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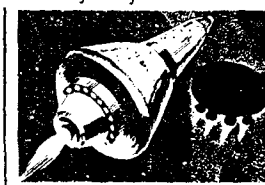

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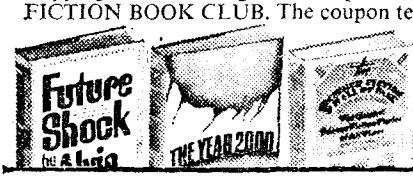

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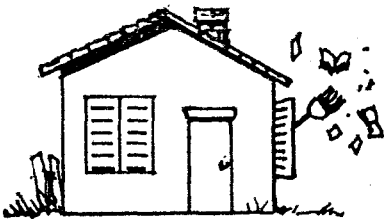

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THE WILL-O'-THE-WISP MYSTERY	Mr. X	6
WHEN SUNS COLLIDE	Anthony Gilbert	20
NO LOOSE ENDS	Miriam Allen deFord	33
INSTEAD OF THE WALL	Robert L. Fish	42
BROKEN TRAIL	Edward Wellen	53
THE PEOPLE NEXT DOOR	Hayden White	64
THE RAJAH'S EMERALDS	Berkely Mather	69
ALL DEBTS OFF	Gary Brandner	80
MAN AND BOY	Michael J. Carroll	91
THE TOTAL PORTRAIT	J. F. Peirce	98
ASHES TO ASHES	E. X. Ferrars	110
CRIME AT RED SPIT	Lawrence Treat	122
THE WAY OUT	Edward D. Hoch	134
GAME WITH ONE RULE	Robert Edward Eckels	147
HARDCOVERS AND PAPERBACKS OF THE MONTH		121
THE JURY BOX	John Dickson Carr	62

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THE WILL-O'-THE-WISP MYSTERY

Part One: *The Pawn*

by MR. X

THE PRISON VAN MADE the run between the Raker County jail and the state penitentiary about twice a month, on an irregular schedule dictated more by the contin-

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gencies of space and the whims of the Sheriff than by any action of the courts in sentencing offenders. Often a convicted felon remained in his cell at the county jail for several weeks before taking the 65-mile ride to his new home.

Thus it was not unusual for five handcuffed men to be led from the side door of the jail one chill Monday morning in early November. The guards glanced at them only casually as the prisoners were motioned inside the back of the van. It was not until the stout matron appeared with her charge that it became clear the trip would be out of the ordinary.

Women prisoners were usually taken to the penitentiary in a special car, since there was the necessity of transporting them with a matron. It was obvious at once that this blonde young woman with the high cheekbones and piercing eyes could not be expected to share the van with five hardened criminals. The driver and the guard discussed the matter and finally decided that the matron and the young woman would ride up front in the cab, while the guard rode in the locked van with the other prisoners. It was not exactly according to regulations, but there seemed to be no other choice.

The arrangement took only a few moments, and a glance at his watch assured the driver that they still had time to reach the penitentiary for the noon meal. On the expressway it was only a 90-minute trip, even counting the frustrations of the downtown traffic.

The young woman did not speak during the early part of the trip, and the driver found himself wondering what her crime had been. He offered her a cigarette, and when she refused he asked, "What are you in for, Miss?"

She held her head high and did not answer. At her side the matron snorted. "Don't you read the papers? She killed her husband."

"Oh."

"She's small-time compared to what's in back, though. You've got a real prize today."

The driver started to ask which of the five she meant, but he never had a chance. He was just turning onto the feeder road leading to the expressway when something rammed the van from behind. Then the air was suddenly filled with smoke —dense, heavy, choking smoke.

"Stay with her!" the driver shouted to the matron as he pulled out his pistol and jumped from the cab. For an instant he could see nothing at all as he struggled through the smoke, his eyes smarting. Then

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a figure in a gas mask, holding a carbine, broke through the haze before him. The driver fired one wild shot at the masked figure, then tried to dodge aside, but a spurt of bullets caught him across the chest.

The man in the gas mask bent over the body and quickly found the driver's keys. In a moment he was unlocking the van's rear door. He stood carefully aside, but there was no reason to worry. The men in the back had known what to do through sheer instinct. They had overpowered the guard a moment after the van had been rammed.

"Take care of the matron," someone ordered. They dragged her screaming from the front seat and one of the masked men hit her with a gun butt.

Then the five male prisoners and the girl were led through the smoke to a station wagon. It would take them to a point where other cars waited for the transfer. By the time the smoke began to clear, there was nothing to be seen but the open van and the bodies on the road beside it.

The entire operation had taken exactly four minutes.

Newspapers and some of the more sensational magazines liked to refer to David Piper as "The Manhunter," a name he disliked. He said it made him sound like little more than a bloodhound—an animal whose sole purpose in life was to hunt down the missing and the wanted. In actuality he had come to his present position following ten years with the state's prison system and another five working with the Probation Department.

When the state legislature became the first in the nation to establish a Department of Apprehension, David Piper had been the logical choice as the Director. He'd chuckled more than once at the ambiguity of the Department's title, but in the end he'd accepted the position. And that was when his troubles really began.

The Department of Apprehension had the assignment of working with established law-enforcement agencies in the capture of escaped convicts, the location of parole violators, and even on occasion the return of runaway teen-agers to their parents. On paper it was a coordinating agency whose aim was to funnel state aid to prisons, parole boards, and local police. That was on paper.

In practice David Piper had come to be considered as something of a semi-official supersleuth, available to any prison or community in the state for everything from

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mediating a convicts' riot to tracking down an escaped killer. The Department of Apprehension had always been understaffed, and when a budget cut further sliced his work force, he'd resigned himself to doing much of the leg work in person. Though he complained to his superiors at every opportunity he privately rather liked the situation—even though it brought with it the distasteful sobriquet of The Manhunter.

David Piper was tall and reasonably good-looking, with a weatherbeaten face that might have come from too many years spent at sea. He was 41 years old, though he looked younger, and married to a career-minded fashion designer whom he seldom saw. She spent most of the year in Manhattan, while he lived a bachelor-like existence in a three-room apartment in the state capital. For better or worse, the job had become his life and lifework.

"Of course you know why we're here," the man facing his desk said. "I'm Inspector Fleming and this is Sheriff Barker, the man in charge of the Raker County jail."

"Yes," David Piper nodded. "The escape from the prison van."

"Exactly. It's been a week now, and there's not a ghost of a clue. The six of them might as well have been swallowed up in an earthquake. Frankly, Mr. Piper, we need the state's help in this. It's like chasing a will-o'-the-wisp!"

David Piper shifted his eyes from the sincere, professional face of Inspector Fleming to the flushed, nervous features of Sheriff Barker. "Any idea how it happened, Sheriff? Or who was behind it?"

Barker shook his head. "I only know the papers have me pegged as the fall guy. They claim if the guard had been up front where he belonged it wouldn't have happened. They say it's my fault for sending the woman and the matron along. Hell, I didn't tell them where to sit! I sent the Gallery girl along to save the cost of a special trip. I try to save the taxpayers a little money and the papers blame me!"

Inspector Fleming interrupted, trying to soothe him. "The girl's presence had nothing to do with it. The whole operation was carefully planned, with rifles and smoke grenades and getaway cars. Besides, they weren't after the girl."

This last part interested Piper. "Who were they after? Nick Bruno?"

"Of course. Who else?"

If any man in the state deserved the title of King of the

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Underworld it was Nick Bruno. At 55 his personal wealth was estimated at many millions of dollars, and he was said to personally control most of the drug traffic in the state. Though he was not Sicilian he had close ties to the Mafia, and to organized crime in other states. Oddly enough, for a man in his position, Nick Bruno's arrest record until now had been limited to a few youthful offenses in the midwest. Since moving east twenty years ago he had led the outward life of a prosperous local businessman, operating a string of first-class restaurants. It was one of these that had caused his downfall. He'd hired two men to burn down one of his own restaurants for the insurance, and the men had bungled the job badly, involving Bruno, who had then been convicted of arson.

"You think Bruno's men sprang him?" Piper asked.

"It had to be. He even boasted at the trial that he'd never spend a single day inside the penitentiary."

Piper frowned and studied the wall. "So he traded it for a life of hiding from the law? He could have been out on parole in two years."

Inspector Fleming shrugged. "Men like Bruno build up such a sense of power that anything is preferable to the loss of esteem that a stretch in the pen might bring."

Piper picked up the list of escapees. "What about Jack Larner? He could have underworld connections. His record indicates he was once a bodyguard for a Miami gangster."

"That was twenty years ago. Larner served time for manslaughter and came out of prison free of the gangs. Besides, most of that Miami crowd is dead now. No, he's been specializing in bank robbery these last few years, all by himself."

"Doesn't bank robbery rate a spell in a Federal prison?"

"The teller couldn't identify him, so we only got a conviction for auto theft and assault. Anyway, he's strictly a loner. It was Bruno they were after."

David Piper looked up smiling as Susan, his secretary, placed the morning mail on his desk. But the smile faded as his hard eyes returned to meet those of his two visitors. "If Nick Bruno's crowd sprang him from that prison van, why did they carefully arrange transportation for the other five as well? And why hasn't at least one of the six turned up by now? There seems to be no connection among them, so it isn't likely they'd stick to-

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gether. Yet that's what happened."

Fleming spread his gnarled hands in a gesture of defeat. "And that's why we're here. Our investigation is at a dead end."

"And the papers are yelling for my scalp!" Sheriff Barker joined in. "All because I sent that girl along."

David Piper nodded, reaching for his favorite pipe. "I'll see what I can do through the usual sources. But please keep in mind that I'm no bloodhound, whatever the newspapers may say. I use informers and follow standard police techniques. Occasionally I get lucky on my contacts, but otherwise I'm no better equipped for this than you are."

Fleming stood up and shook hands. "We have every confidence in your ability, Mr. Piper. You've already suggested a few questions which we hadn't asked ourselves."

"I'll do what I can," Piper promised.

He saw them to the door and then went back to his desk. After a moment Susan entered with coffee. "They want you to find those six who escaped from the prison van?"

He sipped the strong black coffee and nodded. "Another job for The Manhunter. They're beginning to believe my publicity."

She grinned in her impish way. "Just so long as you don't start believing it yourself."

Shaking his head, he flipped through the pages of his private telephone directory. "I'll have to get in touch with some of Bruno's crowd."

"Do you think they'll talk?"

He smiled up at her. "I think they will—to me."

But by the following afternoon David Piper knew it would not be that easy. He'd talked with Tommy, the one-eyed drifter who was his most reliable informer, and with a couple of men on the fringes of Bruno's multimillion-dollar crime empire. They all told him the same thing—that Bruno's friends had nothing to do with the escape from the prison van, that they were as much in the dark as the police.

Piper picked up the alphabetical list of escapees and read it for the hundredth time:

Nick Bruno—underworld king
Hugh Courtney—impostor and murderer
Kate Gallery—murderess
Charlie Hall—swindler and card cheat
Jack Larner—bank robber and car thief
Joe Reilly—forger

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There was nothing to link them, nothing but mere chance having thrown them together in that prison van. Even their crimes were dissimilar. Larner had killed in the past, and Bruno was suspected of having been implicated in a dozen killings, which gave them something in common with Courtney and the girl; but Hall was a small-time swindler and Reilly had probably never carried a weapon in his life.

Six people. Five men and one woman. Somebody had *wanted them free—wanted it* badly enough to murder two guards and injure a prison matron. Piper decided he should talk to the matron, the only living witness.

Her name was Mrs. Tidings and she was resting at home after several days in the hospital. Piper found her with a covering of bandages that almost obscured her graying hair.

"It was terrible," the woman told him, holding a hand to her bandaged head and speaking with just a trace of brogue. "Those poor men who were killed!"

"You said there were three in the gang that attacked the van, Mrs. Tidings?"

"Three that I saw. There might have been more in all that smoke. One drove the truck that rammed into us, and another drove the station wagon."

"They all wore gas masks?"

"Yes. There was no chance of identifying them."

"Did they call any of the prisoners by name?"

"I was up front with the woman prisoner. I didn't see the others at all after they were freed."

David Piper nodded. There was nothing to be learned from Mrs. Tidings. "Thank you," he said. "I'm sorry I had to bother you."

"You'll find them. You're The Manhunter, aren't you?"

He smiled. "I'll get them, Mrs. Tidings."

He went out to his car, hoping he could keep the promise. Ahead, over the city, November clouds were drifting in like sooty blankets, covering the sun.

Only because he had to start somewhere, David Piper chose the last name on the alphabetical list. Joe Reilly was the youngest of the five men, though at 31 he was still six years older than Kate Gallery, the convicted murderess. His photograph showed a short slim man with black hair and mustache, an ordinary type who wouldn't have got a second glance on the street.

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He was married to a successful Broadway and television actress named Margo Miller, who lived in Raker County between shows. Reilly had been arrested two years before, after forging her name to three checks, but charges had been dropped before the trial. This time he'd forged her name and that of her business manager to a whole series of checks. The judge had given him two to five years.

Margo Miller's home was in the fashionable Brookwood section, secluded behind a row of spirelike poplars. Piper parked his car at the foot of the driveway and walked up, noticing the tented bushes and mulched roses already fortified against winter's blasts. The doorbell was answered by a thin pale young man in overalls who, speaking in Spanish, asked David's name.

"David Piper, from the State," he answered, not knowing if he was understood. "I wish to see Senorita Miller."

The man nodded and went away. Presently he returned to motion Piper through a doorway. Margo Miller was inside waiting for him, standing behind a cluttered oak desk and wearing a beige pants suit that accentuated the deep tan of her skin.

"I'm David Piper," he said.

She put down the letter opener she'd been using on the morning mail and turned on her brightest smile, which wasn't bad at all. He guessed her to be a few years older than her husband, but she moved and smiled and gestured with the supreme confidence of youth. She was an actress—not a great one, but successful nonetheless.

"Please have a seat, Mr. Piper. I'll be with you in a jiffy. And I hope you'll excuse Manuel. I don't usually allow my gardener to answer the front door."

He shrugged and sat down. "I've come about your husband."

"The police have already been here. I understand he's still at large."

"He escaped with five others, Miss Miller. They're all still at large, and we suspect they might still be together." He lit his pipe. "Joe Reilly has made no attempt to phone you?"

"Hardly! He cheated me, forged my name to checks! My business manager, Marc Litzen, got taken even worse. My husband wouldn't dare show his face around here."

"But you dropped the charges the previous time."

"I was foolish and in love then. I thought he deserved another chance." She finished

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with the mail and tossed down the letter opener. A troubled frown crossed her brow for just an instant, then vanished. "I've learned a lot in two years."

David Piper nodded. In that moment she could have been his wife, the dedicated career woman, scorning husband and public alike. He had a fleeting memory of Jennie, a world away in New York, but he shut it out of his mind.

"Anyway," she continued, "I can't tell you anything about Joe. He can be in prison or in Timbuktu for all I care."

"I'd like to talk with your manager if I may."

"Marc? He can't tell you anything."

"I have to start somewhere."

She leaned across the desk, studying him with cold, hard eyes. At that moment she was neither a beauty nor a career woman, only a female. "I read the papers, Mr. Piper. They call you The Manhunter, and you only go after the big ones. What's so big about a punk forger doing two to five?"

"He was traveling in fast company when he escaped. And two guards were killed, remember? He could be tried as an accessory."

She thought about that, and finally said, "I'll phone Marc and tell him you're coming."

As she spoke on the phone, her face turned away from him, he stepped to the desk and glanced down at the pile of opened mail. He remembered her sudden frown and was wondering what had caused it. A bill from a Beverly Hills hotel, a card from Compass Galleries with the handwritten notation *Again open for business*, a letter from a little-theater group in Ohio.

"All right," she concluded, hanging up the phone. "Marc can see you in an hour. He's in the Globe Building."

"Thank you."

"This time if you find my husband, lock him up and throw away the key."

He nodded, left the house, and walked down the driveway to his car. As he passed the little Spanish gardener he called out, "Goodbye, Manuel." The man glanced up and smiled.

Piper drove downtown to the glass-sided building where Marc Litzen had his office. Margo Miller's manager proved to be a beefy man with thick eyeglasses and a sense of failure hanging over him. He wondered why she stuck with him, when she could have had any of a dozen New York agents.

"Margo said you'd be coming," he told Piper, extending a limp pudgy hand. "But there's really nothing I can tell you about Joe Reilly."

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"Nothing at all? I understand he forged your name to a number of checks."

"Yes."

"Why did he need the money? I'd have thought life with Margo Miller would have been comfortable enough."

"Does there have to be a reason?"

Piper nodded. "The most likely ones are gambling debts, another woman, or an expensive drug habit."

Litzen blinked his eyes. "Which one do you favor?"

"Reilly escaped with five other prisoners. One of them, Nick Bruno, is the kingpin in a narcotics empire. Drugs could be the thing connecting the six prisoners."

"Nonsense!" the beefy man snorted.

"Margo Miller has a Spanish gardener who might be taking dope. He acted a bit strange this morning."

"Manuel?"

"Yes, if that's really his name. How long has he worked for her?"

Litzen's eyes widened and his gruff manner relaxed into a broad grin. "You think Manuel might be Joe Reilly, don't you? That's the funniest thing I've heard all year!"

Piper didn't see the humor of it. "A man can change his appearance quite a lot by shaving off a mustache and darkening his skin. She admitted she loved him once. Maybe she still does. Maybe she's hiding him there and supporting his drug habit."

Litzen laughed some more, then stopped to wipe the tears from his eyes. Without his glasses he was almost handsome. "First of all, Manuel has worked for Margo ever since she bought the house, four years ago. Second, Joe Reilly doesn't take dope. Third, if Manuel does take it, so what? Four or five percent of the population smokes marijuana these days. You struck out, Mr. Piper."

"Then I'll repeat my question. Why did he need the money?"

"The man's a forger. He had to buy supplies."

David Piper didn't understand. "Supplies? Ballpoint pens to sign more checks?"

Litzen sighed. "An *art* forger! He specializes in Gothic paintings imitating some of the lesser-known Thirteenth Century Italian artists. He paints them, ages them cleverly, then sells them to collectors. But it's an expensive hobby, and a dangerous one. Margo wouldn't pay for his supplies or set him up in the fake art business, so he forged the checks to cover his expenses."

Piper remembered the mail

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on her desk, and the sudden frown. One card had come from Compass Galleries—*Again open for business.* "Thanks, Mr. Litzen. I think you've been a big help."

The gallery was on the ground floor of an apartment house near the river. It was in a fashionable section of the city where one might expect to find a small private art gallery. David Piper walked down a few steps and entered from the street, pausing near the door to study a brightly spotlighted abstract in greens and blues.

A youngish man with blond hair and a ready smile appeared from the back room. "May I help you?"

"I'm looking for the owner," Piper told him.

"The owner resides in New York. I'm Vince McGraw, the manager. Perhaps I can help."

Piper glanced around at the paintings. It was not a large gallery, but there seemed to be a good selection. "I'm looking for an anniversary gift for my wife. She likes the Gothic period. Do you have anything, maybe by one of the Italians?"

"Step this way, please." McGraw led him into the next room, where the contemporary atmosphere gave way to a formalized, heavy-framed grandeur of an earlier age. "Our stock is limited at the moment, but I can show you some fine paintings priced at five thousand dollars."

"That would be about right," Piper agreed, playing for time.

"Here are some fine Spanish examples from the period, all done on wood."

Piper grunted. "All of them are religious subjects, aren't they?"

"The early Church was the major patron of art, especially in the Gothic period. It's only natural that painters chose religious subjects."

Piper was at a loss. The paintings before him could have been priceless relics or clever fakes, and he wouldn't have known the difference. He shifted his gaze to the young man's hairline, seeking evidence of a bleach job. With the mustache gone and the hair bleached, could this be Joe Reilly? Or was he jumping to conclusions as he had with the gardener?

"Do you have anything else from the same period?"

"Gothic?"

"Yes. Thirteenth Century."

The young man hesitated a moment, then motioned toward a workroom in the back. Piper followed him. "Here's one of our very latest acquisitions," he said, sweeping his hand toward

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a large painting of a nobleman. "I don't even have it framed yet. It's an oil on wood, probably painted around 1306 or earlier by Pietro Lorenzetti or his brother Ambrogio."

Piper studied the portrait. For all its faded colors it was still a work of power. It showed a nobleman standing by his horse, wearing body armor and holding a crossbow, about to join knights already battling each other in the background. The nobleman's free hand was raised toward heaven as if in supplication, and a ray of light from the sky suggested that his prayer would be answered.

"Very nice," Piper commented. "And not *too* religious."

"Notice the fine detail work here. The painter would have known his subject well. The Italians of the period were famed for their skill with the crossbow while on horseback. It was a favorite weapon of the Genoese."

"I know," David Piper agreed. "Weapons are a special hobby of mine." He was studying the painting with care. "What are you asking for this?"

"It's more than six hundred and fifty years old. The price would have to be ten thousand, and you'd be getting a bargain."

Piper whistled. "That's a lot of money."

"This painting formerly occupied a place of honor in a European collection."

"I couldn't pay that much —"

A bell rang from the gallery, signaling someone's entrance. David Piper turned and saw Margo Miller standing in the outer room. She caught sight of McGraw and started to speak, but Piper stepped forward to block her line of vision. Her mouth froze as she tried to look from one to the other. Just at that moment, Piper decided, she wasn't much of an actress.

"Hello again," he greeted her, smiling.

"I—what are you doing here?"

"I'm thinking of buying a painting."

She glanced at McGraw. "He's David Piper, from the police. The one the papers call The Manhunter."

McGraw took the whole thing much better than Margo. His brow knitted into a puzzled frown. "What would the police want here?"

David Piper smiled. "I'm searching for this lady's husband, an escaped convict named Joe Reilly. And I've found him."

The young man looked irritated. "Here? Don't be foolish."

"I don't think I am. The

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gallery was closed till recently. You sent Margo a notice that you were back in business, and it seemed to disturb her. She hurried down to see you. Litzen told me Reilly is an art forger who specializes in paintings of the Italian Gothic period, and you just tried to sell me a beautiful Gothic fake."

Irritation changed to indignation on the young face. "No art expert in the world could call that Lorenzetti a fake after just a casual glance!"

"I'm not an art expert. I don't know a thing about brush strokes and pigment and aging. But I do know weapons. I know them backward and forward. Crossbows were such a fearsome weapon in the Middle Ages that the Catholic Church—specifically Pope Innocent the Second—forbade their use in 1139, except in hunting or against infidels. The ban had little effect in practice, but that's not the point. The point is that the painting shows combat between knights, and a knight with a crossbow praying before battle. In an era when most painting was subsidized by the Church, no artist would have painted such a picture, and no nobleman would have posed for it. You knew Italians were experts with crossbows, so you put one in the painting. What you didn't know was that their religion forbade the weapon's use."

McGraw let out his breath. "All right," he mumbled. "I'm Reilly."

"Joe, you fool!" Margo screamed. "Why did you come back so soon? Why didn't you tell me what you were doing?" And then, in one sudden burst of love or loyalty, she swung her handbag straight at Piper's face. "Run, Joe! Run!"

Piper batted her arm away and dived for Reilly's legs, bringing him down near the door. He sat on top of the fallen man and brought out his gun. "No more games," he told Margo. Then, to Joe Reilly, he said, "Cheer up, fella. I guess at least she still loves you."

David Piper was reading a copy of Menninger's book, *The Crime of Punishment*, when Inspector Fleming and Sheriff Barker arrived at his office the following morning.

"Odd sort of book for someone in your business to be reading," Barker commented.

"Not at all," Piper assured them, putting it down. "His ideas are quite interesting, even if I'm not prepared to accept all of them."

Inspector Fleming lit a cigar. "If it'll help you find those other five as quickly as you found Reilly, I'm all for it."

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"What did he tell you about the escape?" Piper asked.

"Very little. He didn't know any of the men who freed him. They just drove him into Connecticut and dropped him at a motel. He doesn't know what happened to the other five."

"Interesting."

Sheriff Barker shifted in his chair. "Sorta ruins your theory that the six of them are somehow linked, doesn't it?"

"Perhaps," David Piper answered slowly. "And yet—any successful prison break is really a battle against odds, isn't it? In most mass escapes, one or two of the prisoners are usually recaptured almost at once. Isn't it possible that to beat the odds our fugitives would be willing to sacrifice one of their number? Possibly Joe Reilly was merely a pawn in their game of chess—a pawn to be sacrificed."

"You think of this as a chess game?"

"I don't know," Piper admitted. "I only know that finding Reilly hasn't gotten us any nearer to the other five, or to the people behind the break. I still have the feeling that when we find the rest, we'll find them all together."

"Even the girl?"

"Yes, even the girl."

Susan stuck her head in at the door. "Pardon me, Mr. Piper, but you asked to be informed immediately of any developments on the missing prisoners. There's an important phone call for you."

"I'll take it here," Piper said, punching a button as he picked up the phone. He listened intently, frowning and giving an occasional grunt. When he hung up he faced the two men across the desk.

"I'm afraid the news puts an entirely different aspect on the whole case, gentlemen." He couldn't hide his deep puzzlement. "What I've just learned puts us even further from the solution than we were before."

(to be continued next month)

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a NEW crime-detective story by

ANTHONY GILBERT

Another solid, substantial, satisfying crime-detective story by Anthony Gilbert, with the author's usual fine sense of "the spirit of the place," and her equally fine delineation of characters who, even if you've never met people exactly like them, will give you the "shock of recognition" that comes with the conviction it all could have happened just as Anthony Gilbert has related it . . .

WHEN SUNS COLLIDE

by ANTHONY GILBERT

THERE MAY BE SOME people at Summerley Green who don't remember when Mary Totten came to us, but there can be few who have forgotten the day she left. Mary wasn't native to the Green; she came at the time the local authorities challenged public opinion by acquiring the old Manor Farm just beyond the village and turning it into a Home for autistic children. At that time quite a number of people didn't know what an autistic child was, and when they found out, there was a good deal of indignation, almost as much as if the proposal concerned an open prison or a Borstal.

My editor wanted me to get the story—I was working for the *County Argus* then, and this kind of institution wasn't as commonplace or as easily acceptable as it has since become. I've moved around the world a lot since that time—I suppose you could say I've gone up in it—but I don't recall summers nowadays so brilliant, or winters so keen, or springs so full of promise as they were then.

I was 24 and Mary was two years younger.

On my way to the Home I ran into Jed Wilson. We'd been to the local school together, and when our contemporaries started to fan out and make for

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the big cities or countries overseas we'd stayed on, he in his uncle's building firm, and I as a cub reporter, though I at all events didn't mean to stay in Summerley Green all my life.

We walked up the hill to the Manor Farm companionably. I didn't guess then that he was going to become my brother-in-law. When we reached the old Manor Farm we both stopped automatically, though for different reasons. He was interested in the structural changes that had been made; the Council had shown a lot of imagination, and Jed's uncle had had a hand in the work.

"Not bad," he said, looking to me for approval. But I had eyes only for Mary Totten.

Perhaps no one could be quite so beautiful as she seemed to me at first sight. She was dark and slender and her features would have enchanted an artist, but there was more to it than that. There's an expression that gardeners use: they say a man has a green thumb, which means that whatever he plants prospers—flowers bloom and shrubs burgeon. Mary had a green thumb for life; just by existing she seemed to create fresh beauty in the world. A lot of water has flowed under the bridges since that day, but I've never changed—not at least until our last meeting and then, you might say, events were dead set against us . . .

Those children were lumped together in the minds of the majority with the mentally handicapped and the subnormal. But Mary would have none of it.

"They are children who live in a world of their own," she insisted, "and who are we, who can't enter their world, to say it's inferior to ours? All we can do is try to provide a bridge so that they can move back and forth." But she made it clear that there must be no compulsion, that the children were free beings.

"You saw her with those kids?" I remarked to Jed later when we were having a pint at The Black Lion. "What would she be like with children of her own?"

"Don't try and upset the applecart," Jed warned me, quite sharply for him. "Any girl worth her salt can beget children, but this girl is different. She belongs to *their* world, she's their means of communication. If you destroy a bridge over a river," he amplified, as if he thought me too dumb to grasp his meaning, "what happens to the people isolated on the far bank? Either they plunge for themselves and drown, or they sicken and

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die—most likely of starvation."

That was like Jed. A normal enough chap in the ordinary way, he had these moods of perception—though that wasn't what I called them in those days—that he voiced without the least self-consciousness. It was an odd thing: my guardian when I was a boy talked apparently the same language, but it never sounded the same. I suppose the difference was that Jed was always sincere. Nevertheless, I couldn't see Mary Totten staying long at the Manor Farm. I didn't believe the local lads would let her.

I was wrong, though. It wasn't that she didn't have her chances—half of us had our hearts at her feet; but none of us was the lucky man. There was speculation as to whether there was a secret someone in the place she'd come from, but I know now that wasn't the case. The gossips, not without a touch of malice, began to prophesy that if she wasn't careful she'd join the ranks of those who wouldn't take the walkers and whom the riders had passed by.

She was barely 25 by that time, but in Summerley Green we marry young. Only Jed didn't seem surprised. At all events, he wasn't among her worshippers, though he liked her well enough.

"I've always been sorry for Prince Consorts," he told me. "A man should rule in his own kingdom, and the average chap's going to have his work cut out trying to live up to all that brilliance."

That was just before he married my healthy plain sister, Nora. And they had two children and a third on the way before Charles Holland arrived to startle the Green as Mary had some years before. I was in The Black Lion the first time I saw him. He came into the bar, not showing off or anything—it was clearly his normal manner; but he gave the impression of being ten feet high. I was reminded instantly of the morning I'd first set eyes on Mary Totten.

Holland was a fair giant of a man; I got the impression that if the place had been plunged into darkness he'd have glowed like a torch. A blind man would have realized something had happened. And if he wasn't as handsome as he seemed at first sight, he was still striking enough to be the center of attraction, wherever he went. My first coherent thought was: here's someone at last who might match up to Mary Totten.

I turned impulsively to Jed, but he was in another of his prophetic moods. "What an old matchmaker you are, Bill," he

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said. "But you can forget about it. It would never work."

"You think you know it all, don't you?" I snapped.

"Use your loaf," Jed advised me. "What happens when two suns collide? You don't get double illumination. On the contrary, the results are ruin and destruction, explosions that desolate and leave barren two worlds."

Charles Holland had come to manage the big wood-pulp factory that had just been erected in the new township of Summerbridge a few miles away. If there'd been an outcry in the Green about the Manor Farm establishment, it was nothing compared with what the old residents had said when they saw the factory going up and the new town being built all around it. A lot of the land the factory used was agricultural, but farming wasn't doing so well then and the value of the land for building purposes was, by comparison, astronomical. The inhabitants of Summerbridge didn't mind; it meant jobs for their young men and women who'd otherwise go far afield. Only the diehards like Freeman of Loseby Farm fulminated against the newcomers, seeing in the development the beginning of the end of what he considered civilization.

"Those clever scoundrels!" he declared. "One of these days they'll find a way to put a factory up on the Downs—by computers, I wouldn't wonder—and we'll all be run by machines." And he was by no means consoled when one of the younger generation retorted insolently, "Why worry, Dad? It won't be in your lifetime."

What followed seemed to me as natural as the night following the day. I wasn't actually in Summerley Green, not even in England, when Mary Totten married Charles Holland. My paper had given me an overseas assignment that kept me out of the country for three months, and when I came back the tongue-wagging, such as it had been, was over. Not that there had been nearly as much of this as the neighborhood had anticipated. The wedding had taken place in London and the couple had gone abroad for the honeymoon. Summerbridge thought this normal, the Green considered it something of a slur.

In a way you could say that Mary became a stranger within a year of her marriage. I don't believe she meant to separate herself from local interests, but Charles Holland entertained a lot in the ostentatious and, to my mind, hideous house that had once been a pleasant

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small-scale manor, and the most we saw of Mary was through the glass of the biggest car in the county, wearing the kind of clothes no one else would have dreamed of buying, not only because of the cost but because they wouldn't have any opportunity for wearing them. They traveled quite a bit, Charles's interests being legion. As for the children who were going to startle everyone, they didn't materialize. It seemed the unkindest quirk of fate that two such splendid potential parents should remain childless more than three years after the wedding.

Nora and Jed had produced another child, the sort you'd have expected Mary's to be. I thought: heredity's an odd thing—hawk-faced Jed and plain good-natured Nora producing such a beauty.

"Poor Mary!" Nora said to me when I went down to inspect the newborn. "I used to think it would be marvelous to be married to a rich man. I didn't realize then that gold can build prison gates as well as castles."

"I can't see Mary allowing herself to be imprisoned by wealth," I assured my sister warmly.

Nora gave me an affectionate sisterly punch. "You never did see any further than the end of your own nose," she told me.

I suppose it was a few months later that I saw for myself how matters stood between the Hollands. I had met Mary once or twice, and though to me her beauty was still untarnished, there was a change in her that shocked me. The widely-spaced eyes, the lovely lines of brow and chin—these nothing could change; but the spirit behind that loveliness seemed to be burning low.

But after I saw Charles Holland in London at a function I attended in an official capacity, I began to understand why. Though he spent so much of his time between walls, he had a broad open-air streak. Jed said once it was a pity we had no pack of hounds in the neighborhood—Holland would have looked well in a pink coat. He was clearly enjoying himself the night I saw him, and giving equal pleasure to his companion—only she wasn't Mary. This girl was dark-haired, but that was about all the two had in common. This one was as alluring as a tigress and about as trustworthy. She was younger, of course. Mary was now in her thirties, and this girl couldn't be more than 22 or 23. I was sure, the instant I set eyes on her,

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this was the reason for Mary's changed appearance. Later Jed was to say to me, "One of the reasons would be more accurate. You must be about the only member of the old gang who didn't know."

The trouble was that at that stage Mary recognized her husband for what he was—and still loved him. At all events, that was the way I read it.

On this particular evening a man named Percy Bedford whom I'd met on more than one assignment moved over to say, "Doesn't the great Charles Holland come from your part of the world?"

"He catapulted into it a few years ago," I said.

"Prides himself as a gambler," Percy continued. "At least, that's what we hear. All I can say is, he's going to need all his luck to handle a girl like Pamela. She's Pamela Cross, you know. And that type always holds out for a wedding ring."

"Then she's wasting her time," I snapped. "Charles Holland's got a wife of his own."

Percy gave me a grin and a nudge. "Wake up, Rip Van Winkle. Did you never hear of divorce?"

"Divorce Mary to marry that little tramp?" I exclaimed.

Percy's eyebrows rose. "That little tramp, as you call her, is likely to inherit if not the earth at all events a sizable portion of it when Grandpappy hands in his dinner pail." His eyebrows twitched again. "Why the heat, Bill? Not declaring an interest either way, are you?"

I was surprised to realize the force of my feeling for Mary after so long. And the folly of it, the sheer waste. Like keeping some huge bonfire burning with no one there to see it. It didn't make sense, of course, but so little that has to do with love ever does. What, I ask you, was the sense of Mary wasting herself on a man who was not only unfaithful to her but apparently didn't care who knew it?

It was Nora who remarked, when next we met, "It won't surprise me if one of these days the great Charles Holland bites off more than even he can chew."

"Why shouldn't Mary divorce *him?*" I demanded.

"Why should she?" Nora said. "He's like those warmongers in the Old Testament, whose vocation was to slay and to lay waste wherever they went. He's spoiled Mary's life, so why should she set him free to ruin someone else's?"

I only saw Mary once more, and that was some months later

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when a line I was following up for my paper took me in a homeward direction. I still thought of the Green as home, since I had no other.

After Mary, all women seemed dull and insipid. In my mind's eye I always remembered her as she had looked on that first day—so radiant, so unquenchable.

Later that afternoon my car broke down with the suddenness and thoroughness that all car owners know. I left it at Martin's Garage and was told to return in a couple of hours to find out what could be done. I'd known Martin's father when I was a boy, and young Martin assured me they'd treat my jalopy as a special job.

A damp, unpromising morning had turned into a fine and spirited afternoon. I phoned through my story and on impulse decided to see if Mary was at home. All about me, pasted onto fences, nailed to tree trunks, were notices of a Fair to be opened by a celebrity that afternoon, which presumably accounted for the general emptiness of the Green. Most probably Mary would be at the Fair with all the rest, but I'd nothing else to do, so I went to look for her.

Charles Holland had contrived to disfigure what had been a charming small Manor House with various additions and embellishments that might have come straight from a Hollywood set. The gardens weren't allowed to ramble; everything was cut back and planned as carefully as a jigsaw puzzle. I decided they'd been laid out by landscape gardeners in the same way that illiterates sometimes buy books—at so much a yard to impress their neighbors with their scholarly propensities.

I went through the elaborate iron gates, half expecting to be accosted by a liveried figure demanding my business; but, except for a faint breeze, nothing stirred. Nobody came when I knocked and rang. I supposed all the domestic staff had gone off. Even men like Charles Holland, for all his wealth, can't persuade the independent Summerbridge women to live in. And I daresay Mary didn't really want them.

Anyhow, as I say, no one came, so on my second impulse of the afternoon I wandered away from the front door and peeped through the windows of the long room that ran from the front to the back of the house. To my mind it was more suited to a showplace than to a home, with a good deal of overdecorative furniture and gaudily painted china in corner cupboards. There was a heavy

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brocaded couch and chairs, and French windows opening onto a sort of loggia.

It could see clearly through the glass, and that's how I saw Mary. She was leaning back in an artificial-looking white-painted chair of Italian design, and she was dreaming or asleep, since she hadn't heard my bell. I went round the side of the house. A second white chair had been pushed back from the table, as though someone had risen hurriedly. On the table itself were two coffee cups, used but empty. Mary lay back, unmoving; she didn't even turn her head when I called her name.

It was then that I saw the small red-capped v[illegible] that had rolled to the ground at her feet.

Unthinking, I picked it up. It was empty now and bore the usual anonymous label—Tablets—and a warning that an overdose could be fatal. I didn't know how many tablets it had contained originally, but it didn't matter any more. I stood there numbly, not quite believing at first that this could be the end of the rare, the beautiful, the brilliant Mary Totten.

I found I was rolling the little vial up and down my sleeve and unthinkingly I dropped it into my pocket.

You know the expression: time stood still. It stood still for me, then, though probably for not more than a minute or two; but it seemed endless. Then my mind began to function again. Surely I should call someone—but who? The doctor? The police? I didn't even think of Charles.

I pushed at the door leading into the house from the garden and it opened easily enough. There was a rack of coats at this far end of the passage that widened beyond the staircase into the handsome hall. I recognized an old green coat that Mary sometimes wore for gardening. I wondered whether she ever wore it now or had merely kept it for auld lang syne. Next to it was the checked sports jacket that Charles Holland used to wear when he walked round what he'd called his Estate. At first glance it was like anyone else's, but if you looked again, you'd detect the fine cloth, the perfection of cut and dash; and even the buttons were unusual. It was faintly damp, so I supposed he'd been wearing it that morning. I supposed he'd gone to the Fair—it would be expected of him—and I wondered what excuse he made for Mary's absence. Or hadn't he bothered?

There was no telephone in the hall, and I didn't fancy

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opening any of the closed doors to look for one. After all, I could use the public booth on the Green. I stood there for quite a while, pondering. When I put my hand in my pocket to find a handkerchief, because I was now sweating, I was struck by the extraordinary quality of the silence all around me. It was the kind of stillness you only find in a deserted house. And it occurred to me that's what this house was—deserted.

In the end I didn't telephone anyone. Mary, I reminded myself, was dead. Nothing I could do would help her now. I walked slowly back and stared down at that dead uncomprehending face. A police officer I once met told me that no matter how a man died, the after-expression was always the same—a kind of anonymous peace. Unless someone's been at work on him with a knife or a gun, he added. I looked for peace in Mary's face, but all I could see was a shell whose occupant had departed. I didn't even say goodbye. There was nothing there to say goodbye to.

I left the premises through the rear garden by a wooden gate in the wall, opening onto tough countryside. In the far distance a car went by, but nothing else moved. I didn't see so much as a squirrel. It was too early to go back for my car, and even if I'd felt like a drink, The Black Lion wouldn't be open; so I climbed the North Down lying beyond the commonland. Local legend declares that during the Ice Age there was a tremendous split in the earth's surface, resulting in an abyss that made a man giddy to gaze into. Yet human resource had made a road there, had even built a few solitary homesteads far down in the valley, remote from the world. They looked like toys from where I was standing.

Fifty years ago, they say, you could walk the Downs from dawn to dusk and see no one but an occasional shepherd tending his flock. But I saw no shepherds that afternoon—not the human kind, that is. As a race, they're like hedgers and ditchers—modern life has rendered them obsolete. I saw the silhouettes of some cattle on the horizon and a church with a square tower among the distant trees. I thought how far-sighted it was of the old builders to erect a tower, rather than a spire that might be snapped off by the pitiless wind that races across the Downs in winter.

On the farther side of the valley a great flock of sheep had turned their noses homeward. They trotted in the stumbling flurried fashion of their kind, as

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if driven by an invisible shepherd. Then I saw the shepherds themselves, a pair of them, half-bred collies, rounding up their charges with a skill and patience that no human could have exceeded. I stood watching for the sheer joy of it. They went about their job with the precision of Regimental Sergeant-Majors. I waited, seeing one of the dogs turn, retrace his steps, to hunt out a stray lamb that had got separated from the main body. Back he came, driving his bleating charge in front of him. I waited till they, too, were like toys against the sky. At last I came back by the lower road to claim my car.

"I've been watching the sheep on the North Down," I told Martin. "That's a fine pair of dogs."

"They'd be Mr. Freeman's two," Martin said. "Took them to the sheepdog trials in London he did, and they beat the rest of 'em hands down." He'd had some good offers for them, Martin continued, but Freeman said he'd as soon sell his wife as his dogs. "Wouldn't let 'em be shown on the telly neither," young Martin added, taking my notes and making change. "I reckon Bess Freeman nigh clawed his eyes out when she heard, but mine are working dogs, Tom Freeman told her, and a working dog's like a workingman, he's got no time for that sort of foolishness."

By the time I'd left Martin's, The Black Lion had a few chaps standing about outside waiting for the door to open. I listened, but Mary Holland's name wasn't mentioned. I'd told Jeb I'd be down this way this afternoon, so it was no great surprise when he pushed the door open, though as a married man he wasn't the customer he used to be. He'd changed less with the years than any man I knew. He didn't envy any of the go-getters who'd done so well for themselves; he was satisfied with life the way it was. He might look like an easy-going sort of fellow, but the man who thought that would soon discover his mistake.

We got chatting, and still there was no mention of Mary. It seemed uncanny to me. When you know a thing yourself, you can't quite credit that no one else knows it. We were still swapping yarns and Jed was saying that Nora was expecting me up at the house that evening when Charles Holland came bursting in. He was a bit heavier, a bit older, but he hadn't lost that air of vitality that would have made him stand out in any crowd. He looked as though he didn't have

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a care in the world. I said as much to Jed in a wry voice, knowing Holland was going to be worried enough pretty soon.

Jed was as cool as the proverbial cucumber. "Peter Pan was never my favorite character," he remarked. "Chaps of that age should be worried, feel the weight of their responsibilities. Could be that's his trouble—that he's never accepted them."

Before I could ask him—because I was curious—just what he meant, the door was pushed open again and Sergeant Larkin came in. He made straight for Charles Holland who grinned at him, but the sergeant didn't grin back.

"Going to give me a parking ticket?" Charles inquired.

But it would be a grim tombstone that could equal the expression on Larkin's face. He said something to Charles that none of us could hear, and Charles stopped smiling, as though someone had rubbed a hand over his mouth. He put down his tankard and got off his stool.

"Accident?" I heard him say, as the pair of them went past without a glance in our direction. "What sort of an accident?"

But nobody could hear what the sergeant said.

Jed and I had another pint, and when we came out of The Black Lion the brilliant light had dimmed. The last stragglers were coming back from the Fair. Peace seemed to surround us like a lake.

But it was all illusory. There wasn't going to be much peace hereabouts for quite a while to come. No one knows how the village grapevine works; presumably the neighbor who had found Mary and called the sergeant had spread the news. At all events, within the hour the rumor had spread from lip to lip. Mary Holland was dead; more than that, it was said she'd taken her own life.

"I don't believe it," said Jed bluntly, when he heard. "Mary was not the suicide type. I'd easier believe that Charles Holland killed her."

And that, believe it or not, was the official verdict.

When it got round that Charles Holland had been arrested for the murder of his wife by poison, the whole place gasped, and no one, I am sure, gasped louder than Charles.

"You're out of your senses," he told the Inspector who came over and made the formal arrest. "I left my wife drinking coffee, and as well then as I was myself. I'd been urging her to come to the Fair, but she said she had a headache. Then there was this phone call and I went

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in to take it"—that, I supposed, explained the pushed-back chair—"and after changing my coat I went straight to meet this fellow straight up to the fairgrounds."

It all sounded very neat, but the police mistrust neatness. And there was more than one witness to testify that Charles had been asking for a divorce and Mary had refused him. It came out, too, that Charles had made the coffee, so that the village woman who came to "oblige" could get off in time to put on her finery for the Fair. She drew a rather attractive picture of him pouring the coffee directly into the cups.

Well, Nora said, anyone could have known he made it. A woman would have put the cups on a tray. And it turned out that he'd added a drop of whiskey to each cup—what's called Irish coffee. Nor did it pass unremarked that the smell of whiskey may disguise another smell that preferably should be undetected.

It was a good story that Charles put up and he might have got away with it but for one thing. When the police started to look for the vial that had held the tablets, they found it in about the last place you might have expected—in the pocket of Charles's green sports jacket. And there was proof that he'd been wearing the jacket that very morning.

The Prosecution's case was that he dropped the vial into his coat pocket when he poisoned Mary's coffee cup, meaning, of course, to dispose of the vial later, or possibly to hang around till the poison started taking effect, and then drop the vial where, in fact, I had actually found it. But apparently he'd been caught off guard by the phone call which, it turned out, wasn't from a chap at all, but from the latest of his women, threatening trouble; so he'd dashed away, they said, and only remembered too late about leaving the vial in the sports jacket.

Anyway, his plan to be the one to find Mary on his return misfired, because a neighbor came in to bring her something from the Fair, found her, and, unlike me, rushed to notify the authorities. Another thing that told against him was that the vial was rubbed clean of fingerprints. I remembered rolling it up and down my sleeve before dropping it into the pocket of Charles's sports jacket . . .

I was in court when the jury brought in a verdict of Guilty. Even then Charles didn't accept it. Some miracle would save

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him at the eleventh hour; this kind of thing couldn't happen to the great Charles Holland. Of course, we don't hang men for murder any more, and a life sentence doesn't have to be more than ten years; but those who have endured it will tell you the sentence doesn't come to an end when the prison gates open. And the world to which Charles Holland will return one day will prove as strange and inimical as the prison where he now lives.

And isn't that right? Isn't that the way it should be? Wasn't it a life sentence the judge gave him?

Sometimes, when I walk over the great North Down and feel the wind in my face and hear the curlews calling, I remember a man who used to like walking there, too. You can't get much exercise in a prison yard.

"Is this British justice?" he'd shouted as they led him away from the court.

Perhaps not. But it's rough justice as I see it, and it was the best I could do on the spur of the moment.

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a *NEW* crime-detective story by

MIRIAM ALLEN deFORD

A "different" kind of story—completely different from what you would expect from Miriam Allen deFord's typewriter. Tough, terse—a kind of "Black Mask" hardboiled yarn brought up to date . . .

NO LOOSE ENDS

by MIRIAM ALLEN deFORD

THE TWO MEN CAME into the big house silently, by the back door where neighbors could not see them. They had no key to the front door, and nobody would have opened it if they had rung the bell.

"All right," Ferguson said. "We stopped and had a drink or two. Is it any of your—"

Girdner looked at him coldly.

"It's very much my business. Do it once more and the deal's off. I'll find someone else. Go to your room, both of you."

She was due any minute.

She was late, as usual. Girdner grimaced. She'd be late for her own funeral.

As well as for her husband's.

It was almost 1:00 a.m. when he heard the car drive up. That was the one dangerous moment.

It was a dark moonless night; he had thought of everything, as he always did. He did not turn on the porch light, just opened the door softly to let her in. Then he himself drove her car to the side of the house, where the bushes were thick. To have directed her where to leave it would have meant an argument. He was soon back and shut the door behind him.

She was standing in the hall, waiting. He did not ask her into the living room.

"Is everything ready?" she asked in that arrogant tone of hers.

"Is everything ready with *you?*" he retorted. When it came to arrogance he could beat her hands down.

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She smiled. "You mean the money? I brought it—half now and half—afterwards."

Girdner swallowed his anger.

"That was not the arrangement, madam. You are buying something, I am selling it. If you did not know I possessed what you want and could guarantee delivery, you would not have come to me in the first place. I must pay off my men tomorrow morning. Pay me what is due and that's the end of it."

She shook her head stubbornly. Girdner clenched his fists.

"What are you afraid of?" he said. "Blackmail? I am a tradesman. When my merchandise is sold I am no longer concerned with the customer."

"Not you—the men you've hired."

"That is the exact word—I hired them. I have hired them before and shall undoubtedly hire them again, or others like them. They are technicians—specialists. They have no interest except in doing their job and getting paid for it.

"Besides, please remember that in both my case and theirs, any future dissatisfaction would inevitably involve you. Neither of us could accuse the other without that. It protects us both—or all of us, if you prefer."

Reluctantly she opened her alligator-skin bag. He counted the currency carefully, inspecting the bills for number sequence and ratio of denominations. He laid the pile casually on the hall table, then reopened the door.

"Good night, madam, and goodbye. Don't turn on your car lights until you reach the highway." He smiled thinly. "After tomorrow your dreams will come true. Congratulations."

He closed and bolted the door after her, listened until he heard the car drive away, picked up the pile of notes, turned out the hall lamp, and climbed the stairs.

He went straight to bed and slept soundly for eight hours.

Dunlap, the deaf-mute whom Girdner had rescued from the slums years before, and who served him with slavish loyalty, gave Coates and Ferguson their breakfast in the kitchen. Girdner had his on a tray in his bedroom. When he had eaten, bathed, shaved, and dressed he came down to his study and rang for the two men to join him.

He looked them over with a critical eye: Coates, the larger one, was calm and taciturn as always, but Ferguson looked jittery and hung over. Girdner

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made a mental note to replace him on the next contract. He would do today, though; he was there only as an assistant to Coates, and Coates could be depended on to follow orders and handle things competently, as long as his pay was safely in his pocket.

There was plenty of time: James Wardle Blakeney never showed up in his office before 11:30 a.m.

"You know what to do," Girdner said crisply. "Any questions?"

Ferguson fidgeted. "Just the same as the Sanchez case, ain't it?"

"Utterly unlike the Sanchez case," Girdner snapped. "That was a straight snatch and the outcome was accidental. This time we're being paid to see that there *is* an accident." Ferguson had the bad taste to snicker. Yes, he must go, Girdner decided, and of course that meant he must be eliminated. How could a man of his experience deteriorate so? Coates, Girdner noticed, was frowning; he must be thinking the same thing.

"Besides," Girdner added, "you ought to have better sense than to mention old business."

"Oh, sure, sure," said Ferguson nervously. I wonder, Girdner thought, if this is because he let himself get married? Marriage ruined a good man in their line of work. Very deliberately he caught Coates's eye, and, out of Ferguson's sight-range, put several more bills on one of the two piles he had placed on the desk. Coates nodded imperceptibly.

"Here's your money," Girdner said. "Count it and then start out. You know the schedule and you've got your plane tickets. Everything okay?"

"Oh, sure, sure," Ferguson said again, stuffing his bills in a pocket without looking at them. Coates counted his carefully, nodded again, and put the money in his wallet. Goodbye, Ferguson, thought Girdner; he'd be joining James Wardle Blakeney before the day was over.

The two left by the back door. Girdner listened till he heard it close and heard Dunlap slip the bolt. Then, his worries over, he leaned back in his chair and lighted his first cigar of the day. Another good business deal taken care of. I think, he meditated, I'll give myself a rest—maybe make a trip somewhere before I take on another job. No sense in being greedy.

James Wardle Blakeney, if he had known it, had several traits in common with Augustus

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Girdner: he was aloof, proud, independent, stubborn, and punctual. He also had a number of traits quite unlike Girdner's, but they were of no importance at the moment.

For the sake of keeping in trim—a matter of vanity for a 44-year-old man with a 26-year-old wife—whenever he was in town he made a point of walking the mile and a half from his townhouse to his office suite, no matter what the weather was, short of a hurricane or blizzard. He always took the same route, walking fast, paying no attention to his surroundings, his mind on the problems awaiting him.

The big problem today was the Metropolitan merger. Should he or should he not use that new gadget during the impending luncheon conference? Was it ethical? Could the beneficial results of its use outweigh its dubious propriety? Newnham, he reflected, was a slippery customer; he would undoubtedly have used it if he had been the one to acquire it. Yes, he decided, he would. He patted his breast pocket. Amazing, what technology could accomplish nowadays!

At which moment, to his annoyance, he was accosted by a man walking in the opposite direction. It annoyed him especially because he did not recognize the dapper, smiling little man who stood before him, his hand expectantly held out to be shaken.

"Mr. Blakeney!" the man said, his teeth gleaming. "How nice to see you again!"

Blakeney met too many people, in too many connections. No memory could fasten all their faces to their names. Moreover, he was noting uneasily, his memory no longer had the elasticity of twenty years ago. But politeness compelled him to take the proffered hand.

"Nice to see you, too, uh—" he began, hoping he was not being so abrupt as to offend someone who might feel he had a claim to be remembered.

But the little man, instead of speaking, grasped Blakeney's hand with a quite surprising strength, and to the financier's bewilderment and alarm pulled him like a reeled fish to a car that had stopped at the curb. Before Blakeney could collect his wits—he had been deep in what he was going to do about the Metropolitan merger—another man, this one big and burly, reached out for his other arm. Between the two of them he was dragged bodily into the car and in less than a minute he was sprawled on the floor of the back seat, gagged, blindfolded, with a rug over him and

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the big man's feet planted firmly on his spine. Blakeney squirmed and gurgled ineffectively as the car proceeded decorously down the street.

Blakeney ceased squirming very soon. It was obvious that he was being kidnaped for ransom; he thought that kind of thing had gone out before World War II. But he remembered very well the accounts he had read of similar occurrences, and it was the victims who had kept their heads and used their wits who not only had come out of it unhurt but had been able to lead the police to the criminals and in some cases had even recovered the ransom money. All his senses were blocked except for his ears, but he could use them.

He knew the routine by heart. He would be taken to an isolated hideaway and kept incommunicado, while the kidnapers either sent a ransom note to his wife or phoned her or contacted one of his business associates. It would probably be the latter, since Iris had no idea where or how to obtain the considerable sum which would of course be demanded. She or his associate would be warned not to notify the police; but they would do so, under cover, he feared. He would rather they didn't: unhappy things occurred to the kidnaped if their go-betweens didn't obey orders.

He heard when they turned onto the throughway, he heard when they left it and the paved highway changed to a dirt road, and other cars passing them became fewer and then nonexistent. Near every large city, within easy riding distance, there are still enclaves of undeveloped or abandoned land, where no one is likely to interfere. These men were professionals; they would have their hiding place prepared. He had a fairly good idea of the direction in which they had come from the city, and he could recall several such spots which at one time or another he had passed in his car and scarcely noted. There must be, he imagined, a rundown house on one of them.

Sure enough, the auto stopped—a ramshackle jalopy, from the feel of it, which again proved the expertise of these criminals: no doubt they had picked it up cheap in some used-car lot, and all that was required of the car was its ability to take them where they were going and back again, minus him and a keeper; after that the car would be dumped somewhere in a side street. No complications with stolen cars, that way. With his talent for administration Blakeney almost approved the arrangements:

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they were neat and businesslike.

"Out," said the big man in the rear, raising his feet from Blakeney's rug-covered body. It was the first word the big man had spoken. The rug was snatched off, and Blakeney wriggled stiffly to the open door and then to his feet on the rough ground.

He had a vague impression of trees around him; certainly there was one close by, against which he steadied himself until the pins and needles in his arms and legs subsided. Now they would hustle him into the house, which must be very near, and into a dark room which would be his prison cell until he was ransomed. He did not dream there was no house within a mile in any direction.

"Okay," said Ferguson. "Move away."

He was talking to Coates, who let go of Blakeney's arm. Ferguson stepped between two of the scrub pines in this cut-over tract and aimed carefully for the back of Blakeney's neck.

Blakeney fell prone, heavily, without a sound. There was a momentary twitch, and then he was still.

"Pretty good, eh?" Ferguson chortled. He laughed, a high whinnying laugh.

"Clean as a whistle," Coates agreed. "You always are, I've heard." Now for the changes in the original plan.

Ferguson was all keyed up. Coates looked at him in disgust. Girdner was right: Ferguson had been a useful man in his time, but his time was over. He had become expendable.

"Well, now," said Ferguson excitedly, "you roll him over—he's heavy. We'll leave his wallet on him—they have to find the identity cards—but a guy like that must carry plenty of cash, and there's no reason we shouldn't have it. Kind of a bonus," he tittered.

Plan change Number One: *no* money must be taken from Blakeney or the police would know there had been a third person present. No time to waste.

Ferguson had his gun back in the holster and was lighting a cigarette. He kept on chattering and moving around.

"Then, as soon as we get that done, back in the car and off, eh? Get to the city, dump this heap where you said, and then we can separate and each beat it to the airport, and you go your way and I'll go mine. You ever do a job for Girdner before?"

"Twice," said Coates. "You?"

"More than that. But never one like this—just ordinary

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torpedo jobs." He laughed. "This one sure is a dilly, isn't it? That guy Girdner—what a brain!"

"Zip your lip," said Coates. Loose talk was one thing he abominated.

Ferguson laughed again. He kept on chattering.

"Who's to hear, except you and our deceased friend here? Gosh, did you ever hear of a setup like this one? How to become a wealthy widow in one swoop! Wonder how she got on to Girdner in the first place?"

"Same way we did," said Coates. "Syndicate connections. She's not a floozie but she's sure no ministering angel. Probably she had it all worked out from the beginning. Now if you'll just—"

"Okay, okay, let me get my breath first. No hurry. Yeah, I guess that was it. She's half his age and twice as pretty!" Ferguson giggled. "He probably picked her up in a bar in the first place, and then she trapped him. I kind of admire her. Of course Girdner must have worked out the details with her; but the whole thing—to write the ransom note to herself—at Girdner's dictation, I suppose, and he'd see she had a safe typewriter that could be got rid of afterwards—then to spill it to the fuzz, after she'd the same as paid the ransom already—and you can bet it was a big one—we got good pay but it's only a small bit of the main amount—"

Coates had had enough. "Hey!" he said harshly. "Look there!"

Startled, Ferguson turned. Instantly Coates, twice Ferguson's weight and strength, seized him, dragged Ferguson's gun out again—both bullets must come from the same weapon—and before the smaller man could collect his thoughts, Coates shot him through the temple, the gun close enough to leave a powder burn.

Ferguson slumped in a heap. Deftly Coates fastened the dead hand around the gun. No need to wipe for his own fingerprints—on the car, either; he hadn't touched a thing that would show any, and Ferguson's didn't matter any more.

Plan change number two: he couldn't take the car. That would be another give-away that a third person had been concerned. Well, it was early yet, and not more than four or five miles to the nearest bus station in a small town. Anything left to do?

Yeah, Ferguson's share of the money; he, Coates, had earned it, and besides, it would look suspicious if Ferguson had too much on him. He took all but the reasonable sum Fer-

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guson might be expected to carry, and transferred the notes, with his own larger share, to the money belt he had brought along to keep his pockets from bulging. Ferguson's air-flight ticket? No, leave that; it would lead them to Ferguson even before they identified his prints. Coates hitched his trousers and looked around to make sure nothing had been forgotten.

All set. Ferguson had bought the car, Coates had never set eyes on the little man till they had met at Girdner's yesterday, so there was nothing to connect them. Just one question: should he hasten the discovery by an anonymous phone call? Girdner had made it plain that Blakeney's body must be found promptly; a dead husband had to be produced before the will could be probated. This place was isolated, but wouldn't hunters or kids or hikers taking a short cut be likely to stumble on it within the next day or so? Maybe not.

Well, before he took the bus he'd phone police headquarters in the city, give them the tip, and hang up. She was going to call the cops the minute she got the ransom letter she had mailed to herself, and by then it would be all over the newspapers and TV.

With a last glance at the satisfactory tableau Coates started confidently down the dirt road to the highway, alert to conceal himself at the sight of any wayfarer. Nothing living crossed his path except one lone jackrabbit. With his present luck, few cars would be on the highway at this time of day, and if he saw one coming he would start to jog. He didn't dress as square as Girdner, but he looked square enough to be taken for a devotee of the new fad of jogging; nobody would mistake him for a hitchhiker, anyway, and stop to pick him up.

He strode on, smiling at the memory of the sudden terror on Ferguson's face in the second before he died. Let them try to puzzle out why the kidnaper had killed his victim and then suddenly, for some inexplicable reason, killed himself with the same weapon.

A good job, well done, Coates gloated. A thoroughly professional job, no loose ends.

Everything went like clockwork. Iris Blakeney wasn't even nervous. You couldn't be nervous, not with an entrepreneur like Girdner in charge. All she had to do was follow his instructions precisely, and she did. Apparently one of his men had even phoned in a tip to insure the quick discovery of

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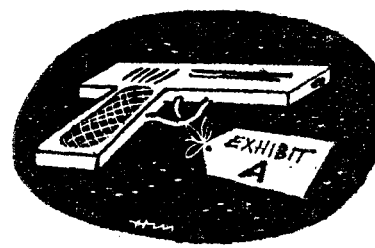
poor James, for his body had been found before dark that same evening.

She rehearsed herself in the shock and grief the news should bring her. Soon the phone would begin to ring, and then she would be besieged by reporters and by James's friends and relatives and business associates. Thank heaven she had none of her own. Only a week or so of fuss and bother, and then her new, her wonderful new life would start. Yes, a ring at the front door already; she tensed for the first encounter as she heard the maid go to the door.

Two men were ushered in. They were in civilian clothes but of course she recognized them as detectives. "Have you—have you any news?" she asked quaveringly, as if she hadn't heard on TV.

She listened in utter dismay as one of them began to recite the litany which precedes every arrest since the Miranda ruling. "What on earth—" she began, switching quickly from shock to outrage.

"Come off it, sister," said the other detective wearily. "Know what we found in the breast pocket of your husband's suit? One of those nice new little mini-tape-recorders. And when he fell it hit the ground and activated itself. And boy, has it been talking!"



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a *NEW* crime story by

ROBERT L. FISH

The Colonel, the Captain, and the Major held the fate of ex-Dictator Don Diego in their hands—rather, in their minds. The ex-Dictator must die—but how? It was a difficult decision—but all decisions involving life and death after a successful revolution are constitutionally difficult . . .

The "serious" Robert L. Fish in contrast with the outrageously punning spoofer of the Sacred Canon (or Conan, if you prefer) . . .

INSTEAD OF THE WALL

by ROBERT L. FISH

THE REVOLUTIONARY Tribunal was holding court-martial on the wide veranda of the Dictator's hacienda, where Don Diego Rafael, the ex-leader, had been captured. It had been extremely foolhardy for him to delay his flight to safety in order to return for the valuables secreted there, and the price for this madness was now in the process of being paid and collected. The Dictator's battered figure was held upright by tight ropes lashing him to a hard chair; hopelessness lay across his brutal face and blood was slowly drying in the corner of his bruised mouth.

The Tribunal consisted of three members, three oddly contrasting types swept together by the confusion of the revolution.

The Colonel had been a professor of ancient history at the University in civilian life, which—although it seemed hard for him to believe—had been only the week before. His lanky figure was clothed in the incongruous raiment of war, but he still appeared to be the teacher, the arbiter, his fingers clasped together in tortured indecision. Beneath the dusty campaign hat his lean face hid in shadow, but his deep-set eyes still seemed to reflect a certain pity for friend and foe alike. To him the revolution represented

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an answer to his country's evolutionary problems.

The Captain had been a graduate student of law in civilian life, yet one would have assumed he had been born to war, for he was the only one of the three who looked soldierly. He was the youngest, but also the most explosive, and he wore his uniform with a dash that appealed to the troops. His bravery had been demonstrated often in the short week of the revolt; it had been the audacity of his attack on the hacienda that had swept aside the defenders and trapped the Dictator. The timeliness of the revolution had saved him from the certainty of death before a firing squad, for he had been himself a prisoner on the day the revolutionary junta's plans had matured. Yet to him the revolution had meant more than the mere saving of his life; to him it represented the answer to his emotional problems.

The Major had been a pharmacist in civilian life. Years before he had been a medical student, but he had been forced by circumstances to shorten his studies, and the lesser goal of pharmacy had been the result. The Major served the revolution both as Medical and Security Officer. He was a man who realized his shortcomings and as a result tended to extreme care in all his decisions. In appearance he was nondescript with thinning hair and thick spectacles, yet with a certain dignity of bearing. To him the revolution represented the answer to a personal problem.

The audience were peon troops, ragged and unshaven, curious and uncertain, yet quiet and—at least for the moment—trusting, leaning on their ancient rifles or squatting with their stained machetes in fist, covering the open area between the main house and the other buildings of the sprawling hacienda. Possibly it was respect for the authority of the Tribunal, or possibly it was unconscious memory of fear for the bound figure so miraculously imprisoned before them on the porch; in any event they stayed well back from the wide flowerbeds that rimmed the veranda. The tropical blooms remained inviolate, the smooth borders untrodden.

That, then, was the tableau when the young Captain leaned forward in his wicker chair, gesticulating abruptly. His pistol was cramped between the arm of the chair and his thigh, but he made no move to free it, enjoying the feeling of power in the pressure.

"Why do we waste words?" he asked, almost curiously. His

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thick black hair arched itself over his forehead as he swung about. He looked through the stocky figure of Don Diego as if it were not there. "What is there to discuss? We put him against a wall and we shoot him. The way he would shoot us if our positions were reversed. What is the question?"

The prisoner glanced at the Captain indifferently and tried to wet his caked lips. A few more days, he thought, and this one, at least, would have been far removed from all conflict or discussions. Students!

There was a rising hum of assent for the Captain's arguments from the peon troops. Rifles were held aloft and machetes shaken. The movement was like the bowing of a grain field before a sudden wind, brought back to a chilled stillness by the raised hand of the Colonel.

"No," he said wearily, as if repeating a lesson that echoed endlessly in the classroom of his mind. "No. We fought this revolution to put an end to people being put against walls and shot. Or has everyone forgotten?"

The hum rose again from the peon troops, an undercurrent of anger, of rebellion, behind it. The Colonel swung about in his chair, facing the troops, raising his voice.

"My friends," he said—and it was not the professor speaking, or the pseudo-soldier exercising his authority; it was a priest in a pulpit expounding a verity—"my friends, would you have him victorious? Would you have Don Diego Rafael win after all? Our new constitution prohibits the death penalty for all people and for all crimes. Would you have our worst enemy wipe out our greatest gain even before we have a chance to taste the first fruits of our victory?"

His voice dropped, as if to force reason to take sway over emotion.

"No, my friends. We cannot make an exception, even for him. Particularly for him. He would besmirch our revolution by dying against a wall. He would expose all our fine words as mockery, all our ideas as hypocrisy. By dying before a firing squad he would damage the revolution as he was never able to damage it with his secret police, or his torture chambers, or his spies." He shook his head slowly. "No. That cannot be the solution. He must not be executed."

The prisoner watched him idly. This one he remembered. A professor, a theorist, a dreamer, an idealist. A fool. Also a waster of time. Don Diego knew native troops, for

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he had come from their ranks, and he also knew the depth of their hatred for him. The chafing of his bonds did not greatly bother him, for he realized the bonds were only temporary.

"But revenge?" the young Captain cried.

"At best, an empty word," said the Colonel drily. "At worst, a dangerous word."

"But in prison he would be a constant threat! He would be a source of infection, a rallying point for all our enemies. What do you suggest then—that we let him go free?"

The sound from the massed troops became a growl, loud and hostile. Then the Captain answered his own question, raising his hand abruptly to command silence.

"That's not a bad idea," he cried, his voice reaching the farthest man. "That's the perfect answer! We let him go free—in the center of the Plaza, at high noon on Thursday, at the very hour of the celebration!"

The tension was broken; there was a roar of laughter from the troops, echoing from the surrounding buildings. The Captain's smile faded; he turned to the Colonel. "It really is not a bad idea," he said soberly.

"No," said the Colonel quietly. He waited for silence. "That would be worse than execution; that would be murder. But we are not murderers." He swung about, facing the courtyard, his voice raised in an anger quite unlike him. "My friends, we are not assassins! And do not permit that anyone makes assassins of you!"

The troops stared at each other in puzzlement.

The beaten, bound prisoner smiled inwardly at the sheer stupidity of the trial. He, at least, had no illusions as to his ultimate fate. The troops would eventually tire of the discussion, and then he would hang by his heels from one of the roof beams of the veranda, his throat cut like a pig's, his blood dripping, and they would use his dead body for firing practise until the amusement wore off.

In the silence that had fallen, a throat was cleared diffidently.

"Perhaps—?" It was the colorless Major, the Medical and Security Officer, looking worriedly at the others through his thick glasses, sitting forward selfconsciously, embarrassed at having to speak. "Perhaps—by his own hand?"

Whispers broke out among the troops at this amazing suggestion. The other two members of the Tribunal studied him frowningly, as if they had completely forgotten

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he was there, or that he was also involved in the decision. It was the young Captain who finally spoke.

"By his own hand?" He smiled drily. "Suicide while escaping? I'll settle for that."

The nondescript Major was honestly shocked.

"Oh, no!" he said hastily. "Nothing like that." He looked at the Colonel as if for support, but the lanky senior officer only eyed him curiously. He had a feeling he remembered the Major from somewhere in the past, but he couldn't pinpoint the memory. What he did know was that in the week they had been fighting together, he had found the Major to be a cautious man who seldom spoke without good reason. Denied even the tacit support of the Colonel, the Major coughed apologetically.

"What I meant was—well, there must be some way—I mean, there has to be some way to convince him—"

"What way?" The young Captain was disgusted. "We can't threaten him with death. My God, we can't even threaten him with freedom!" His bitterness was impersonal; he honestly could see no reason for the entire discussion.

The prisoner's eyes had become wary. This Major he did not know, and there was something in the suggestion not quite in keeping with the look in the eyes swimming behind the heavy lenses. The ex-Dictator tightened against his bonds, listening carefully.

"His wife, perhaps?" The Major shrugged delicately, as if he disliked his own suggestion but could find none better. "Her well-being? Possibly to protect her our prisoner might—?" He saw the Colonel's eyebrows rise. "Yes, I know. It is blackmail of a type, but still it's better than execution or assassination. What can one do? It is decidedly a problem."

The prisoner's eyes narrowed; his brain raced. They could not honestly believe he would choose to die by his own hand just to save that fat miserable cow of a wife, could they? Or could they? It was obvious, at least, that the nondescript Major thought they could. At least it was something to work on; an idea began to form in his mind.

"My wife?" They were the first words he had spoken, and the familiar hated, harsh voice brought instant attention from all. He stared coldly at his three judges, open contempt in his voice. "Your revolution kills innocent women?"

Both the Captain and the Colonel opened their lips to speak, one to accuse and the

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other to deny, but the small Major interposed swiftly, once again honestly shocked.

"Oh, no!" he said. "But still, she really isn't very popular. The least she would receive would be a long prison term, and no one knows better than you, Don Diego, how unpleasant some of our prisons are." He fumbled into silence, the prisoner watching him closely. The troops drank in the drama tensely.

"And if I accept?" the Dictator demanded.

The Major spread his hands quickly. He wanted no interruption from anyone at this point. "Then she would be freed. Beyond the border. Safely, that is."

The prisoner mentally shook his head at the idiocy of the entire proceedings. How different if he were handling a comparable case! The wall—and that would be it. But this Major—what did he have in mind? The prisoner stared at his feet. The proposal would give him a few more hours of life; the question would be how best to use them. He had lived precariously too long ever to discount even the slimmest of possibilities. Of course, if they should happen to lock him in the library for his dramatic suicide—but that was really dreaming, and besides it was just dusk, and hours before real darkness fell.

This is all a dream, the prisoner thought sourly; the troops will never stand for even one extra minute of life for me; long before full darkness I shall be dead and looped upside down from a porch beam. Still, while there was life there was hope . . .

He looked speculatively at his captors, then said, "All right. I accept. My life for my wife's freedom."

A sound, almost a moan, passed among the tense troops. This was drama beyond their expectations. Don Diego had been quite wrong in his calculation of their mood. To them the fact that he would shoot himself was by far the most satisfactory solution; and they would still have his body when it was over. The Colonel seemed to sense the feelings of the men. Once more he took command.

"The sentence of this Tribunal, then," he said in a formal voice that suddenly seemed too loud in the hush that had fallen, "is that you be locked up in a place of confinement for one hour with a pistol containing—"

"One hour?" It was the spectacled Major interrupting, combining simple query with anxiety. He cast his eyes to the

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almost-descended sun, as if to draw strength from its waning rays. He crossed himself. "One hour is not sufficient time in which a man can make his peace with God. Now that the decision has been taken, we should allow him proper time to prepare his soul—"

"Very well," said the Colonel. He was not a strongly religious man, but he felt he understood the need in others. He turned back to the rigid figure of the watching prisoner. "The sentence of this Tribunal, then, is that you be locked in a place of confinement with a pistol containing one bullet, that you be given food and drink for twelve hours—until dawn, to be precise—and at that time . . ."

His voice trailed off into purposeful silence. The prisoner watched him with slitted eyes, his mind racing furiously. Thanks to the Major, he now had time until darkness swallowed the hacienda. Now, if only—

"There is a regular cell block beyond the stables," the young Captain said. Now that the decision had been made he looked at the prisoner as one might study the body of someone already dead. "God alone knows how many have spent their final hours there."

Once again the small Major interrupted, apologetically, but hurriedly.

"The house, I would suggest," he said cautiously. "True, the cell block has barred windows, but it would be most difficult to guard. Some of the troops may not share your—our—dislike of execution. And, too, they could stare. Any man, even Don Diego Rafael deserves the right to privacy when he prepares himself for his Maker. I have examined the house quite carefully and I should say the library would be the proper place. Only the one door, no windows; the other three walls are covered with bookshelves that reach from floor to ceiling. An impossible place to escape from, and most easily guarded."

The prisoner forced himself to present an icy-calm exterior in the face of this incredible good fortune. The absolute, utter, incompetent fools! To think the Colonel and the Captain had been so completely taken in by the little man with the thick glasses! And what would the little Major want later for his service? Money? A position when the revolution was finally defeated? A small price—and not necessarily payable, either.

"The library, then," said the Colonel, suddenly tired. He rose to his feet. "You will give him a liter of wine, a kilo of bread,

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and half a kilo of cheese. And a pistol with one bullet." He knew he could leave the details to the Security Officer; he turned abruptly on his heel and walked quickly down the steps through the ranks of the still troops. The young Captain also rose, staring down at the blank-faced prisoner.

"It is my sincere hope," he said almost conversationally, "that your nerve fails. Or your aim." He turned abruptly from the frozen tableau and followed the Colonel.

The small Major pushed himself diffidently to his feet and approached the prisoner, cutting the bonds that held the battered man to the chair.

"We must go now," he said quietly. "To the library."

For the tenth time the ex-Dictator looked at his watch by the light of the small desk lamp; before him the crumbs of his meal remained, and a portion of the wine. He got to his feet. Nine o'clock—the troops would be around their fires, rifles stacked, discussing the drama of the afternoon, drunk or almost drunk on the wine from his cellars, anticipating hanging his dead body by the heels come dawn; except that by dawn he would be far away. It was time to go.

He finished the last of the wine, checked his pistol with its one bullet, placing the cartridge under the firing pin, and moved to the wall. A pity his weapons had been removed from the library, but he hoped it would be unnecessary to use even the one bullet he had. Sound was not part of his plan.

He withdrew a book from the shelf against the east wall with a faint smile—it was the Bible—reached behind it for the secret lever, and pressed it. A section of the shelves swung out silently, smoothly, revealing stone steps leading down into blackness. The Bible was replaced, a tall candle was taken from its wall holder and lighted, then held high as Don Diego studied the empty passage by the flickering light. A faint musty odor rose to meet him, but no sound.

He paused on the first step and pressed a second lever. The section of the shelves behind him fitted back into the wall; no crack of light at their edges betrayed the tunnel.

The steps were slightly slippery and uneven, as was the floor of the burrow through which he slowly passed, holding the taper high in one hand, pistol in the other, his shadow leaping behind him with each slow step, sliding from side to side along the flagged passage and riding the damp stone

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walls. A curve disclosed a second staircase, this one narrower. He blew out the candle and put it in his pocket, then, holding his pistol rigidly before him, he felt his way up the steps.

At the square stone panel that fitted into the ceiling he paused, pressing his ear to it as best he could in his cramped position. There was no sound, nor had he expected one. The secret passage led to a burial crypt. It was the last place any of the peon troops would go, even with one of the servant girls, or any of the camp followers.

He turned in the small space and pressed his back against the stone, feeling it move. With an extra effort he lifted, raising it, feeling the slight draft as the stale air of the windowless vault flowed past him into the sunken tunnel. He slid the stone to one side and climbed out, facing a darkness as complete as that he had left. The slab he allowed to remain where it was; once he was found to have fled, discovery of the secret passage was only a matter of time and no longer of importance to him.

Hand before him, he found the wall and slid along it until he reached the door. A candle could not be trusted here; the crypt door was not as airtight as the bookshelves. It was doubtful if light would make much difference this far from the main house but it was pointless to take any risk at this stage. The crypt was beyond the corrals, and guards would not be placed beyond the horses; still there was no telling who might be in the area for some purpose. That Major, for example, waiting for his payment. For a moment the ex-Dictator grinned. The bullet in his gun might well be an ironic payment for the Major.

He opened the door the faintest crack, peering out into the dim moonlit night. After the black vault the trees appeared clearly—dark shadows against a blacker outline of the foothills leading to mountains beneath a faintly lighter sky. Once at the corral, should he be challenged by a guard, he could pretend to be a drunken soldier or—if need be—there was still the one bulet, though it seemed a shame not to save it for the Major.

He kept the door open, listening intently, hearing only the pounding of his own heart and his own stifled breathing. He started to open the door wider when a sudden wave of nausea swept him, a spell of dizziness. He fought it down. This is no time for nerves, he commanded himself silently and fiercely, and returned his

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attention to the door, checking once again before taking his first step outside to freedom.

A sound behind him made him pause; he turned to face the blinding beam of a flashlight. He closed his eyes against it, then opened them, raising the pistol; but he found to his surprise that he had somehow stumbled and was now on the floor, his pistol arm supporting him, his mind confused, his breathing suddenly painful.

"You wanted the library and you got it," said the Major softly. He moved around the fallen man, closing the door, continuing to speak in the same soft voice. The reflected light from his flashlight gave his eyes an eerie appearance behind their thick lenses. "And you wanted the hours until darkness to escape, didn't you?"

"What do you want?" the ex-Dictator gasped.

It seemed to Don Diego that another person was speaking, not himself, although the harshness of tone seemed vaguely familiar. He remained propped on one arm, listening to the echo in his mind. The pain surged back, gripping him more fiercely this time; a groan escaped his dry lips.

"You," said the Major, and smiled down at the man on the floor. "Tell me, did I concoct the potion in the wine properly? I'm a pharmacist, you know, and a good one, but still it took a lot of thought. Would you drink it all at once, or would you save some until just before you left? A final draught, say, to give you courage on your escape? Did you taste anything at all? And the time—of course I had to chance that, but I felt you wouldn't wait much after nine; you would have figured the troops would be drunk enough by then. And eight might not be dark enough this time of year." The Major's smile remained fixed, a rictus on his thin lips. "Tell me, do you feel the pain? Good, good! It will get worse, you know."

The man on the floor suddenly forced himself to sit erect; he raised the pistol with both hands, fighting down the hard clutch at his vitals, aiming the weapon at the man who was grinning down at him, then pulling the trigger with his last spurt of energy. He fell back from the recoil. There was a shout from outside; the door burst open to reveal a guard.

"He's dead," said the Major quietly, almost sadly. "Get the Colonel and the Captain." He stared down at the body as the guard ran out. "Did you think I'd give you a real bullet? If you'd have been caught you might have used it on yourself.

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And did you think I'd let anyone else have you? Even the revolution? Even yourself? Did you really?"

"A secret passage!" said the Captain, his eyes moving from the open hole in the crypt floor to the contorted features of the dead Dictator. His eyes came up to the sober face of the small Major. "It was lucky you happened to be walking this way and heard him."

The Colonel dropped down beside the body. His eyes came up, surprised.

"But if he shot at you and missed, what did he die of? You aren't even armed."

"It was fear," said the young Captain with both conviction and disdain. "Look at him! Look at the expression on his face! He was always a coward and in the end his own cowardice killed him. He died of fear!" He shrugged and walked to the door. "In any event he's dead. That's the important thing." He lit a cigarette, flipped the match in the general direction of the body, and walked out into the moonlight.

The Colonel studied the Major for several seconds in silence; then recognition suddenly flashed in his eyes.

"I know who you are," he said at last. "You were born in this house, weren't you? You were raised here. Don Diego killed your father when he became Dictator. And took over this hacienda. Isn't that true?"

"Yes," said the Major softly.

The Colonel came to his feet slowly, staring down at the body.

"I don't think it was fear that killed him," he said quietly, and brought his eyes up. "I think it was guilty conscience."

"Yes," said the Major. He bent and picked up the burnt match and then stared about the crypt at the coffins of his ancestors, as if apologizing for having desecrated their tomb.

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A change of reading pace—a Western detective story told in a style all its own, as terse, tight-lipped, and dogged as Sheriff Tom Hardesty on the trail of an escaped prisoner who may be holding the Sheriff's daughter as hostage . . .

BROKEN TRAIL

by EDWARD WELLEN

COFFINVILLE WAS GETting civilized: it had a school, a church, and a jail. Jail was in a two-story building. Cells, office, and kitchen were on the ground floor, the Sheriff's living quarters on the second, and a corral stood out back.

Sheriff Tom Hardesty came to in the cell where his lone prisoner had been.

The Sheriff sat up on the bunk. He fought the swirl inside his head. *Ruth.* Had Nick Miles, in making his getaway, however he had made it, harmed Ruth?

"Ruth!" His heart had got in the way of his voice; he tried again.

No answer. He was at the bars, wrenching at the door. No give.

He backed slowly till the touch of the bunk triggered his folding onto it. His head hung heavy. Looked as though he not only had to figure out how he got in but how he could get out.

The dust storm in his mind both hindered and helped him in figuring out the first part. He had been in a drugged sleep. Only one way it could've happened. Ruth had put sleeping powders in the black coffee he had drunk to stay awake. Ruth, his own daughter. He clamped his jaws tight against the shock and hurt of that betrayal.

He raised his head off his chest. He stared himself into seeing straight, then faced the window and looked at the barred square of night. He guessed it to be shading toward dawn. They had the start on him of six hours. Every minute he wasted getting out would give them that much more of a lead.

That Ruth hadn't simply let Nick Miles out but had gone off with the man was a thing that

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didn't come to him by thinking but as a sudden knowing. His face burned. He prided himself on reading sign—and here right under his eyes he hadn't seen a thing.

He should've seen it coming from the very first, which was the night of the day he'd brought Miles in. He had been wrong to let Miles draw him into talk.

"Sheriff, say a certain big rancher wants my land to fill out his spread. Knowing the man I mean, do you think he'd be above doing a botchy job of working my brand over his own to make me out to be a rustler?"

"That ain't for me to say."

"True, Sheriff. That's for the judge and jury. Tell me now: how much do you think of my chances with them?"

He had to be honest with Miles.

"Not much. Not with that judge in that rancher's pocket, and that jury beholden to him, too."

And just then Ruth had come along with Miles's supper. She stopped soup-spilling short. Her face lost its tight look—from the start she had stared at Nick Miles in fascinated disapproval of his wild reputation—and her lips parted.

"If you think that, Daddy, why don't you let him slip out? Or spirit him away to the state capital?"

She reddened at once. She knew the law was the law and he had sworn to uphold it. Without any ifs or buts.

"Just slide the stuff in when I tell you, Ruth. Step back from the door, Miles."

An untamed lock of hair fell across Nick's forehead as he nodded. His eyes were bold and his smile was reckless.

"Right, Sheriff. Thank you, Miss Ruth. Sure do look temptin'."

It was the Sheriff's turn to redden. Miles's gaze had been not on the food but on Ruth. The Sheriff reddened again thinking of it.

He got up and moved to the bars. Last he remembered, he had been sitting in that hard chair by that beat-up oak desk, sipping the hot black coffee. The desk stood sideways to the cell and some five feet away. He raised up on his toes to see down into the half-open near drawer. The light of the smoky coal-oil lamp hanging from the ceiling struck a glint of metal. They had tossed the key ring back into the drawer after locking him in.

He could yell and bring help running. But his mouth only tightened. Then it twisted. Ruth knew he couldn't make himself cry out. That was why

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she and Nick hadn't gagged and bound him. But to have to wait till dawn, when his deputy came to spell him—

He looked again at the drawer holding the key ring. It was no nearer. He took off his belt. A grimace flickered as the slight potbelly held the pants up. He gauged the distance to the knob of the drawer and shook his head, but he gave it a try anyway. Sure enough, even when he held the belt as close to the end as he dared and thrust his arm between the bars till they squeezed his flesh, the swing fell inches short of the drawer knob. And the solid square loop of the brass buckle, even if he bent the tongue back out of the way, was too smooth and too stiff for any kind of purchase. He needed a running noose. He unknotted the string tie Ruth had always made him wear.

"You have the dignity of your position to uphold, so don't fuss, Daddy. There, now"—a nice kiss—"don't you look handsome!"

Nick Miles wore his shirt open at the throat. But that hadn't seemed to weigh with Ruth, had it now?

He secured one end of the tie to the buckle and made a slipknot of the other end. He dried his palm and gripped the tongue of the belt.

He lost count of the throws it took to lasso the knob.

And then when he had the noose tight on the neck of the knob he found that although he was all the way over to the edge of the cell it still wasn't far enough to give him all the sidewise leverage he needed. The drawer came out only so far and no farther.

He stuck his right foot through the bars and gave the taut belt a sideways kick. He caught a bar with his free hand to keep from falling backward. The string tie snapped. But just before that the drawer slid out enough to overbalance and fall to the floor.

For a moment he thought the drawer would land upside down with the knob facing away from him, trapping the key ring for good. But he was in luck that far. Still, most of the string tie dangled from the knob; barely two inches of it remained fixed to the belt buckle. He needed a new noose. He lifted out his shirt tail, tore off a strip, and made the replacement.

When he had lassoed the knob again, he pulled the drawer and the key ring within reach. He picked out the key and got it into the lock. As he turned it a thought struck him. He would have to remember to shift the desk around to keep a

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prisoner from pulling a like break.

If he were still Sheriff. And that hung on bringing his latest prisoner back. There would be no bringing back if—

He found a note on the desk. Reading, he put on his belt.

"Daddy, I'm sorry. But I had to. Love, Ruth."

He crumpled the note and tossed it into the shadows. Then he lost a precious minute retrieving the note and burning it to ashes.

He made for the kitchen. He didn't know what-all should be on hand in the larder. That was Ruth's department, taking up after her mother died. But he could tell by spills and scatter that Ruth had been at the stuff with the same thought in mind before him. In a sweat to get away, the two of them. He helped himself to flour and bacon and made up a bundle.

Upstairs quickly to change his shirt and to get his bedroll out of the closet. He didn't strike a light but went by feel and by the faint glow from below. He didn't care to meet his own eyes in the dresser mirror or the eyes of Dorothy in the framed tintype, the eyes—so much like Ruth's—of the young bride from the East. He had failed her. The tintype said that, fading, ever fading, just as the shine had worn off the eyes of the woman herself.

No. That had not been his doing, that had been life itself, life and her nature. He had to believe that or just plain quit. He tightened his belt, hurried back down.

The shock had worn off while he was busy doing. Now he found himself thinking clearly, looking ahead. Nick had repossessed the gear and the gun he had on him when the Sheriff had taken him in. And he had helped himself to the Sheriff's Winchester and .45 and had cleaned out the boxes of cartridges for those weapons. He had also appropriated the Sheriff's field glasses. Appeared that Nick meant to watch his back trail and to make a stand if he had to.

The Sheriff took his deputy's battered Winchester from the wall. He checked to see it was loaded. It would have to do.

Didn't surprise him, on letting himself out the back door and gaining his night sight, to learn they had taken his long-legged sorrel and Nick's own big blood bay, leaving in the corral only Ruth's old ringboned gelding. Any real hard riding and the gelding would go lame. He eyed the gelding and hardened his heart. Going to the livery stable for a better mount would mean

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rousing the town's loosest tongue. He could feel the muscles work in his cheeks. He got his old cavalry saddle on the gelding, tied on his gear, booted the Winchester, and mounted.

They would head west out of town. That way gave them a choice of the border or the mountains. East was only desert. He walked the gelding through the dark still town. He kept his mind off what the town would say and do when it woke up and found all three were gone.

He kept his mind off what he would say and do when he caught up with the two. Once out of town he cut for sign. By now false dawn had given way to dawn and he could see to read prints and droppings. But he had to work on foot much of the way, leading the gelding.

It was hard trailing, for the country was very dry. It was a broken trail at best. Here they had struck out across the range so cattle hoofs would wipe out their traces. And there they had splashed up a little creek to leave no hoofprints on solid ground.

He held onto the tracks as though holding onto a lariat. One set of tracks belonged to his own sorrel; the sorrel's hind hoofprints always cut into the front hoofprints. The other prints were those of bar shoes, and sidestepping showed that the horse had a sensitive mouth: that would be the bay. He had noticed that about Nick's bay and wondered if Nick had broken the horse himself. A badly broken horse showed meanness in the man. This gave the Sheriff a flash of perverse hope and fear. Maybe Ruth wasn't all that willing a hostage.

Now that he had picked up their traces he rode the gelding in hard spurts, pausing only to lean over and make sure, his one aim to catch up with them before nightfall. But the gelding soon began to favor his left forefoot. The Sheriff grimaced. At this rate, if he followed every twist and turn of the way Nick and Ruth took to throw off pursuit, he'd fall farther and farther behind them.

Making a gesture as though casting loose a lariat, he swung the old gelding away from the faint traces on the broken land and made toward where he knew the arrow-straight trail lay. He hit it and rode due west. He was gambling that they would double back, up ahead, and that he would find where they crossed the trail.

It seemed to him that he had ridden the trail long, too long, way past any place where they might have crossed it. Either he

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had missed the crossing or he had guessed wrong, lost his gamble. Then he picked them up—the hind hoofprints cutting into the front hoofprints and the sidestepping bar shoes, his own long-legged sorrel and Nick's big blood bay. Faint but fresh, no more than an hour old. The gamble had paid off. He had narrowed their lead to no more than an hour.

They had crossed the east-west trail diagonally, northeast to southwest. He looked southwest where the land swelled into steep, rough, pine-shaggy hills. He scanned the slopes. Nothing moved. Then he caught the glitter of sun striking glass. It came from a stand of pine. His own field glasses trained on him? Most likely. So Nick and Ruth knew he was gaining on them, knew they couldn't shake him, throw him off. Almost at once the glitter vanished, but he had fixed the spot.

He looked back along the trail. At first he saw nothing. Then far back he saw a plume of darkness. Might be only a dust devil stirring or a rain cloud building. Then again it might be a posse coming. He walked the gelding off the trail, to the left. He dismounted, tied the gelding to a juniper, broke off a branch on the side away from the trail, crossed the trail, and came back bending to brush out the hoofprints and his own bootmarks as he backed across again. Didn't want any lynching party to catch up.

He alone had let Nick Miles get away. He alone would bring Nick Miles back—one way or the other. He flung the branch far to the other side of the trail, untied the gelding, mounted, and headed southwest toward the vanished glitter.

Sweating in the noon sun and stiffening sorely in the saddle, he worked up the valley into the timber, forcing the gelding. It was well into the afternoon when he broke out into the open on the other side of the hill, but even so the sky darkened sooner than it should've. That plume of darkness far back on the trail had tokened rain that now overtook him. He got his yellow slicker on just as the rain began to sheet down.

And before the rain scratched it out along with everything else he spotted a landmark and a trail below leading to it and knew where he was and where Nick had to be making for. The landmark was Saddle Rock, a volcanic upthrust with fore and hind projections just like the pommel and cantle of a saddle.

Saddle Rock Mountain split the way in two. The left fork of the trail wound around Saddle

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Rock and took you to the border and across. The right fork took you to the state capital. If Nick took the right fork it meant he would put his case to a fair judge and an honest jury. If Nick took the left fork it meant he had gone outlaw, either because he was guilty of rustling for all his talk of a frame-up or because he had despaired of the law and of getting justice.

The gelding was balking on the downslope. The gelding's ringboned legs must be hurting. Not only that, the gelding didn't want to trust himself on the wet shale slanting to the bottom. The Sheriff kneed him on down.

The Sheriff felt it coming and just as the gelding lost footing, the Sheriff threw himself from the saddle to keep from falling under the gelding. He got up bruised but whole and stood looking down at the gelding. The gelding looked back at him. Both knew the gelding was done for.

The Sheriff tugged the Winchester from the boot. One less bullet if he caught up to Nick. He got out of the gelding's angle of vision and shot the gelding in the head. There was the shudder of shock, then stillness, then the rain beat a lasting shiver through the dead flesh.

The Sheriff slid and heel-gouged his way down to the trail and hoofed it toward Saddle Rock.

The rain had washed and still washed their tracks away but a sucking mile along, the Sheriff found in the dripping shelter of a forked juniper that they had stopped to breathe and feed the horses and themselves. Then he read signs of hurry. They had heard the shot. They had figured he was signaling to his posse the way the hunted had gone. They couldn't know that he had got out of the cell by himself, that there was no posse, and that he was afoot.

He studied the hoofprint and bootprints. Nick and Ruth had cut their halt short. Nick had helped Ruth mount the bay, then Nick had mounted the sorrel. The only reason the Sheriff could see for them to switch horses now would be if the bay had started a saddle gall. Ruth would be much lighter in the saddle than Nick. But he frowned. He had a glimmer of another reason.

Sure enough, after going the remaining mile to where Saddle Rock split the way in two, following where Nick and Ruth had ridden side by side, he saw the real reason. Here where the trail forked they had swung the horses real close to say so long,

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maybe to kiss goodbye, the bay sidestepping to the last, and then Nick on the sorrel had taken the left fork, the bay the right.

The Sheriff gave a tight smile. They were counting on him to keep on after the bay. They hadn't counted on his reading the slurred flurry of prints under the juniper and knowing they had switched horses. So Nick on the long-legged sorrel would be making for the border while Ruth on Nick's big blood bay would be drawing off pursuers. The smile faded. One thing to know which way Nick was riding, another thing to be following him afoot.

He gauged Saddle Rock through the screen of rain. If he climbed Saddle Rock between cantle and pommel he just might cut across to the trail again before Nick had made the way around. If he pushed himself hard, without heeding what the sharp glassy rock would do to his flesh, he just might pull it off. Even then, by that time it would be dark. Odds against, but he had to try.

He stood on the trail. He had made it. He was torn and bloody but he had made it. And it wasn't all that dark. A runny moon toned down the blackness. But it showed him he hadn't made it ahead of Nick. He looked back along an empty length of trail.

Then he stopped his rough breathing. Hoofbeats. Not back but on the stretch ahead. He whirled. In the last scuffling feet of the climb down and the beat of the rain on his slashed slicker he hadn't heard the hoofs. But it evened out—the rider hadn't heard him.

Steel slashes of rain cut the blobs up but he made them out. A weary figure in ankle-length yellow slicker rode a weary long-legged sorrel away from the Sheriff.

The Sheriff glanced up at the hidden sky as though performing some sacrificial rite. Then he fixed on the yellow blob, figured the distance at two hundred yards, and fingered his rifle sight up to that. Best thing was to aim not at horse but at rider. Not only would he be needing the horse but a downed horse would leave a dangerously live rider. And aim not just to wound but to kill. And on the first shot. Only thing to do. Nick was younger, faster, in far better shape. Calling out for Nick to stop and give himself up would likely be calling out for the Sheriff's own death.

The Winchester felt heavy as lead but he held it steady. Nick was drawing away. The Sheriff heard himself call out.

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"Grab your ears!"

He tensed for Nick to whirl and snap a shot at him.

But slowly and carefully the rider reined in the sorrel. A pale face turned toward him. A face blurry as one in a faded tintype. Ruth's face.

Blood thundered in Sheriff Tom Hardesty's head, almost drowning out Ruth's words of surrender.

"Calf rope, Daddy."

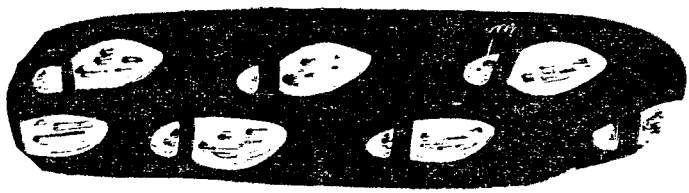
He saw by a flash of inner lightning that Ruth and Nick had switched horses twice. Once on the ground under the juniper for him to read the signs and think he had seen through the trick. And once at the fork, when they brought their horses together for a moment as if only to kiss and part but really to change horses without dismounting.

He felt warm, with a kind of pride in himself and in them. They hadn't low-rated him one bit. They had counted on his reading the slurred flurry of prints under the juniper after all. And then he felt a chill, realizing his finger was still crooking on the trigger. He lowered the Winchester as Ruth turned the sorrel and came up to him.

Fear flickered on her face as she looked at him and saw his condition.

"You all right, Daddy?"

"Me? Sure." He swayed a bit and put a hand on the sorrel to hold himself upright. "A few minutes' rest and I'll be ready to head back to the fork and on to the state capital to catch up with Nick. One thing, though, Ruth. Seems we'll have to ride double."



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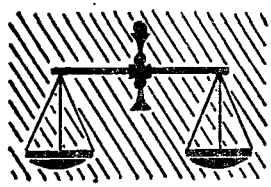

THE JURY BOX

by JOHN DICKSON CARR

A change in the format of this magazine will mean less space in which the skipper of your friendly column may pontificate. Henceforward, instead of the three pages allowed me for almost a year, we shall revert to the chaste two pages of yore.

Yet to be so restricted can offer positive advantages. There will be more space for appraising the books themselves, and such enforced conciseness should effectually curb your mentor's congenital fondness for talking too much.

We begin, at least, with a good omen. This month, thank fate, I can offer you four titles, all new, all as expertly contrived as smoothly written: three classic detective novels and one strong mystery-adventure with detective overtones too. Equally divided between British and American, they have been written by a trio of homicidal ladies and one murderous-minded gentleman at the top of his form.

With *A Guilty Thing Surprised*, by Ruth Rendell (Crime Club, $4.50), Mrs. Rendell more than lives up to the reputation for ingenuity and craft she has established in seven earlier novels.

Despite the outwardly placid life of Elizabeth and Quentin Nightingale at Myfield Manor during that golden country weather, decorative Elizabeth goes once too often into the darkling woods near the house, and for no apparent reason is brutally slain. It upsets the husband with whom she gets on almost too well; it even upsets the brother with whom she can't get on at all, and stills the incessant giggling of an *au pair* girl from Holland. Chief Inspector Wexford, that able investigator we have met before, guides his less sensitive colleague, Inspector Burden, amid evidence as twisted as the emotions behind each move.

English poets and poetry are of importance here. If the main poet had been somebody other than Wordsworth, perhaps

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Wexford might sooner have realized where to look. You, sir or madam, will be a shrewd old hand if *you* anticipate the end.

Pick Up Sticks, by Emma Lathen (Simon and Schuster, $4.95), finds Banker-Detective John Putnam Thatcher away from Wall Street, away from New York and on the Appalachian Trail through New Hampshire with a messily killed corpse in the housing development called Fiord Haven. Distracted as much by high-pressure salesmanship as by the mystery, Thatcher slogs through a profoundly human story to its triumphant end. And, though you must be financially as well as intellectually alert to pick them up, all the clues are there.

If Catherine Aird's *A Late Phoenix* (Crime Club, $4.50) seems as unconventional in its approach as in its construction, this casual air only emphasizes its ultimate dramatic effect.

Set in an English provincial city, investigated by Detective-Inspector Sloan, our problem concerns the skeleton of a once young (and pregnant) girl found under bomb-site rubble long after the end of Hitler's War. Humor, thrill, deft characterization all animate lost hopes, lost fears from a time long gone, when the blood ran fast and these middle-aged people still were young.

The Green Hell Treasure, by Robert L. Fish (Putnam, $4.95), proves once more that at sheer storytelling Mr. Fish has no superior in the business. Captain José Da Silva, Interpol and the Brazilian Police, together with his friend Wilson from the American Embassy and alluring Diana Cogswell of Interpol, faces the aftermath of a fifteen-year-old crime as deadly as ever.

The vicious, intelligent leader of four black conspirators from Barbados has just been let out of jail—free, unless Da Silva can nail him, to pick up a fortune in still-hidden loot. Then it's detection as well as action all the way, with surprises at every turn and a final cumulative surprise to top them all. Give it A-plus; it's a beautiful job.

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About the people who live next door: to them you and your family are the people who live next door. It's all in the point of view . . .

THE PEOPLE NEXT DOOR

by HAYDEN WHITE

OUR NEW NEIGHBORS arrived quietly. They moved in with no fuss, with few smiles and even fewer words.

My wife, Madge, was more vocal. She came to me the day after the Harrisons—that was the name of the new people—settled in.

"Honey! John! Listen to me!"

I put down my glasses, smiling. After fifteen years of marriage we can just about tell each other's mood. Madge was excited. But then, Madge is always excited.

"What is it, dear?"

"John, you quit smiling. This is serious. It's our neighbors."

"Oh? I met Harrison yesterday. Seemed like a nice guy."

Madge frowned and the wrinkles made her look older. "Everyone seems nice to you, honey. You're wrong though; there's something very odd about these people. I mean it."

"Yes, dear. Like what?"

"Like the fact I tried to help Norma, that's her name, Norma, and she refused. Why, the woman almost pushed me right out of her kitchen."

"I can't imagine why."

"John!"

"Well, dear," I said, "maybe she doesn't want your help. Not everyone does, believe it or not."

"But, John, she pushed me right out—"

"Madge, you're repeating yourself."

"All right, all right. But just you wait! I tell you these people are strange. You ought to go over there and see what I mean."

I put my glasses on and rose from my chair. "I'm going to do something better than that."

"What?"

"Take a nap."

It didn't end there. That evening after dinner I noticed my wife standing at our kitchen window.

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"Madge, what are you doing?"

"John, come here!"

Reluctantly I walked to the window. Madge had the curtains parted and you could see the Harrison house next door.

I sighed. "What is it?"

"Look for yourself!"

She was referring to Harrison, who was clearly visible, standing in his lighted kitchen, holding onto a phone.

"He's making a phone call," I said. "So what?"

Madge glanced at me sharply. "*So what?* He's been on that phone for an hour. Over an hour!"

"Madge, for heaven's sake!"

"He has. Really! How many *men* stay on the phone for an hour? How many?"

I was getting irritated. "Businessmen. All kinds of them. Stop this, Madge. It's getting silly."

"We'll see."

Shrugging, I said, "I'm going to bed. Coming?"

Her eyes never left the window. "In a few minutes."

It wasn't a few minutes. I woke sometime later, almost an hour and a half later, and Madge was not in bed. I felt her side of the bed. It was cold.

Worried, I put on my slippers, tied my robe, and went down to the kitchen.

Madge was still at the window, looking out intently.

She saw me and waved furiously. "Come here, quick!"

I moved forward, reached the window, and peeked out. Harrison was on the phone.

"Hmmm," I said.

"He's been on the phone all the time," Madge whispered excitedly. "The same call. And you missed the best part!"

Confused, I asked, "What best part?"

Her eyes were triumphant. "When he cleaned his gun. A handgun."

Now, that was interesting. I studied Harrison for a few moments. He appeared to have stayed in the same exact position as before. His thick body leaned against a sliding glass door and his head bobbed every so often.

"It does seem strange," I admitted.

"I told you so. Didn't I?"

I grinned, kissing my wife on the cheek. "Yes, dear, so you did. Well, I've got that appointment tomorrow morning—Jamie again. He's been talking about calling the police. I'm going to bed."

Madge said good night, adding, "I'll keep you posted."

Laughing, I said, "I'm sure you will."

Madge made at least four or five reports a day. For three

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days in a row I heard rumors, factual information, wild guesses, and interesting sidelights, all concerning the Harrison family. What Madge lacked in professionalism she made up for in vitality.

"John! Please pay attention!"

"A hundred percent, dear. Like always."

"Uh huh. You big fink. Anyway, the Harrison boy, Randy, goes to Troy High. His mother, that's Norma, takes him there and picks him up every day. She never misses."

"So?"

"With the school bus stop only half a block away?"

I'd forgotten. "Yes, that is odd."

"And," Madge continued, "don't forget about Mr. Harrison—no one knows his first name. Even the mailbox says only Mr. and Mrs. Harrison."

Worried, I asked, "You aren't going to steal one of his letters, are you?"

"Don't be silly! Of course not. It's not a bad idea though."

"Madge!"

"Yes, John. Anyway, as I was saying, Mr. Harrison stays in the house all day. He doesn't go out. Not even for a walk. His wife does all the shopping and she even brings the groceries in herself. Imagine!"

"Sounds like a well-trained wife to me," I said.

"Or a lazy husband, huh?"

"You made your point, dear."

Madge waved her left hand in the air. "And that's not all. He keeps getting phone calls. Long ones. Any time of the day. You name it."

To make my wife happy I joined in the game. "What about visitors?"

"Are you kidding?" Madge snapped. "Him? Old Stay-at-home letting his wife do all the errands? Fat chance anyone would want to see him."

"So, no visitors?"

"No, and unless they start acting neighborly they won't have any! None at all."

But Madge was wrong.

The next evening, as we were eating a late supper, two men came to see the Harrisons. Madge almost fell out of her chair getting the curtains open wider.

"John," she whispered. "Look!"

Both men were big, with heavy overcoats, and they seemed awkward standing in the Harrison kitchen. I could see Harrison's back as he sat facing his guests; there were other chairs in the room, but evidently the two men preferred to stand.

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Madge announced, "I'm going out to water the shrubs."

"At eight o'clock at night?"

"Well . . ."

"Madge, you're being a snoop. You shouldn't do it."

Her left eye half closed and we had a secret understanding. Before she left the room I cautioned, "Be careful. And listen good."

Madge looked exactly like a conspirator.

I kept an eye on the window and Madge appeared in our side yard, dragging the heavy black hose behind her. We have several tall Italian cypresses near the side wall; Madge would be quite close to our neighbor's kitchen window.

With an Academy Award performance my wife dutifully watered each cypress, tromping along the grass and staying near the wall. She moved frequently, which was just as well since she didn't want to be caught and it was cold out there.

After twenty minutes or so Madge reappeared, her nose twitching, her teeth chattering.

"Oooooweeee! Is it cold or what? I'm freezin'!"

"Was it worth it?"

Her frown said no. "I can't say for sure. It was hard to hear. Besides being cold. But I couldn't help hearing somebody. The same voice. It kept repeating over and over, 'It's the safest thing to do.' "

"The safest thing to do?"

Madge nodded. "That's what I heard. And someone, just once, said, 'Hiding's no fun.' I almost dropped the hose on my foot when I heard *that!*"

"I'll bet." I looked out. The two men were still there.

"What do you think it means, John? Hiding out? From what?"

Instead of answering I asked, "Or from who, possibly?"

We studied each other for a long moment.

That night we both stayed at the window. Watching.

The two men were still around the next morning. I couldn't see them from the window, but Madge said their car was parked in front of the Harrison house. How my wife knew which car was theirs I didn't ask; Madge knows these things.

At exactly 8:00 a.m. one of the men came out of the house with the boy Randy. They got in the strange car and left.

Norma, the mother, could not be seen.

About an hour later the window shade was lifted and the kitchen curtains were pulled aside. The Harrisons and the second man were in the small room, standing—and then all moving at once.

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Mrs. Harrison opened the sliding glass door and came outside. She appeared to be crying. I watched as she bent down over the dichondra lawn, played with a few bits of devil grass, finally rose and went back inside. The glass door was shut. Hard.

Madge shook her head, saying, "What is all this?"

"I'm going to make a phone call." I left the room.

I called my boss, talked for five minutes, then returned to the kitchen. Madge had nothing new to report.

"Well, I have," I told her.

"Who from? Andy?"

Andy's my boss. "Right. Harrison's first name is Robert. Robert Harrison. He's a policeman."

Madge turned to me, clicking her tongue against her teeth. "Go on," she said.

"Apparently he was the one who got the evidence on the Conrad brothers. His information and testimony was the clincher." The Conrad brothers were recently convicted of extortion.

My wife returned her attention to the window. "So now comes the worrying."

"That's right," I agreed. "Wouldn't you? The Conrads had many friends. *Have* many friends. In high places and some not so high. Some even deadly."

The phone rang. This time I took it on the kitchen extension.

It was Andy. He spoke briefly, saying very little but communicating a great deal through prearranged key words.

I hung up the phone.

"Andy?" Madge was curious again.

"Uh huh."

"And?"

"Harrison has to be hit. I took the contract."

Madge nodded. "I'm glad you got the job." She pushed aside the curtains with a final, dismissing motion. "Now maybe we can get some new neighbors. Nice ones."

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a NEW crime story by

BERKELY MATHER

first publication in the UNITED STATES

A phony robbery, an irresistible fee—a pushover, a perfect setup—nothing could go wrong, absolutely nothing. But as Stanton said, "I've heard that one before"...another bright and engaging crime story by Berkely Mather...

THE RAJAH'S EMERALDS

by BERKELY MATHER

PITHER TWIRLED HIS glass abstractedly, held it to the light, swirled the whiskey, then sank it with what Stanton knew was meant to be an air of finality. He didn't get up, however, and Stanton could see that from under his bushy eyebrows he was still regarding him obliquely.

"So it's no go?" Pither inquired.

"Rice gives me shingles," Stanton told him. "They feed it twice a day in Bombay jail, they tell me. Monotonous, apart from anything else."

"You were recommended as a man who didn't mind taking a chance once in a while," Pither said.

"This is not one of those whiles. Anyhow, who did the recommending?"

"Cleary."

"The hell he did?" Stanton mixed just the right shade of indignation with the question. "His company pay him to make snide reports on passengers?"

"We're just beating our gums, Stanton," Pither growled. "Two thousand, then—in sterling. That's a hell of a lot of money for a job like this."

"Still no go. Cleary may be right when he says I don't mind getting a bit close to the wind

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on occasions—but I'm not a professional crook either."

Pither gave a long-suffering sigh. "This isn't professional crookedness. It's helping a client of mine out—a client who wants to do something for some of those poor devils of subjects of his."

"My heart bleeds for him, and them," Stanton said, with a sudden grin.

"Three thousand—and that's tops."

Stanton sat looking at his empty glass, and Pither beckoned to a bearer for more soda and ice. He poured two more pegs from the bottle of Scotch he carried in his bulging briefcase. The house detective, by the archway leading to the lounge, flapped his hands agitatedly and pointed to a uniformed Hindu at the reception desk.

"What's the matter with him?" Stanton asked. "What's all that tic-tac stuff?"

"House dick pointing out a prohibition officer," Pither grunted. "This damned place went dry when the British marched out. Bottoms up."

"It's still no go. But I'd be glad to hear a few more details."

"Ram Sarup Rajendra Prakash," Pither said. "Exalted Maharajah of Brinjnath, Protector of the Poor—"

"Skip it," Stanton cut in. "A gent with one bath towel round his bonce and another round his middle wants me to crack a safe. The fee is three thousand. Now let's have the details, with a modicum of truth mixed in."

"Eighty thousand pounds worth of emeralds," Pither began. "And all you've got to do—"

"Whose emeralds?"

"His."

"And he's lost the key?" Stanton grinned again.

"Not quite. He'll lend you the key." Pither gestured dismissively. "All he wants you to do is muss up the door. Make it look like an outside job."

"Wouldn't fool a blind monkey."

"Good enough for the local law. You're not dealing with Scotland Yard, you know."

"All right, then. I open the safe and scratch it about a bit. What happens to the green ice?"

"You bring it back to me."

"And you do what with it?"

"None of your damned business," Pither said. "But for the record, and it happens to be the truth, we've got a buyer at fifty thousand. Ram Sarup wants the money for perfectly genuine public works in his State. His Cabinet won't give him any, nor would they allow him to sell State property.

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Believe it or not, it's as simple as that."

"So you're offering me three thousand to stage a phony robbery. Haven't you got any local talent?"

"None that we could trust not to blackmail us afterwards."

"How do you know I wouldn't?"

"I don't want to sound pompous," Pither said, "but I deal in men. I know 'em. I've got to. That's why I picked you." He grinned drily. "Besides, you're going on to England. You can't work blackmail by remote control."

Stanton choked over his whiskey and a little warmth was engendered between them for the first time.

"What's the setup?" he asked.

"Old dump of a palace out Mahalaxmi way," Pither said. "Ten minutes by car from the center of Bombay. It's the townhouse of his State. He's brought the ice down here for cleaning and, in some cases, resetting. Perfectly legitimate."

"Who will there be on the premises?"

"The retinue sleep in one wing. Nobody to worry about. Private secretary, couple of personal servants. The bulk of the hired help live in godowns behind the palace. There's an armed guard on the main gate, of course."

"Lovely. What are they armed with?"

"Bloody great brass cannon and muzzle-loading muskets. None of 'em been fired since East India Company days. You don't have to worry, they're there for ceremonial purposes only. If they thought they were being burgled they'd shove their heads under the blankets and scream."

"How do I get in?"

Pither reached for his brief case and fished out a sheet of paper. He spread it on the table between them and half covered it with *The Times of Western India.*

"Here you are," he said. "Here's the main road, and this is the racecourse. Take a taxi out just before midnight. Stop just short of the club, which is here. Stroll on like any other good-time Charlie, nip off the road by this traffic roundabout, cross the paddock, and you come up to the back wall of the palace. You can't miss it."

"I've heard that one before," Stanton said.

Pither ignored him. He said, "Climb over the wall—it's half dilapidated—and you'll find yourself in a mango grove. Go through it, being careful past the servants' quarters, and you're right under the first-

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floor balcony. It's trellised and climbable. Get up onto the balcony and you'll find three French windows facing you. That's His Highness's study. The safe is bang in front of you. Bob's your uncle."

Stanton studied the map for some minutes, then nodded. "Okay, I get the stuff out. What's it in, by the way?"

"Two green morocco cases. But you'd better not bring those, because they've got coats-of-arms all over 'em. I'll give you a cloth bag."

"Right. They're in the bag. I scratch the door and keyhole up a bit. Got any tools?"

"I'll give you a jimmy, a couple of bits, and some wire. You can leave those around."

"Fine. I come out then and presumably back the same way. Where do I meet you?"

"Get another taxi outside the club. There'll be lots of people coming and going about that time. Dismiss the taxi in Hornby Road and get another one to Braganza's Star of India Hotel. I'll be in the ballroom watching the floor show; table in the corner on the right. You put the bag on the floor. I'll pass you your dough in an envelope. Fivers."

Stanton frowned. "Three thousand? A bulky envelope."

"That's only for checking in the gents. You can have this brief case to carry it away."

"How long will all this take?" Stanton asked.

"According to my working, you should be out there and back in under forty-five minutes. You needn't worry if you're not. I'll be in the Star from midnight on."

Stanton sat back in his chair and considered. "All right," he said after a long interval. "Fair enough as it goes—provided it *does* go. What say it doesn't?"

"It will," Pither said confidently. "You're not the sort of bloke to slip up on a pushover."

He reached for the bottle again but Stanton covered his own glass with his palm. "*I* won't slip up," he said. "Not if all this is jannock. But suppose I was pinched?"

"You'd still get your three thousand forwarded to any address you care to give me. Apart from that, you'd be on your own. We just wouldn't know you, even if you were fool enough to spill all this. Somehow I don't think you would be fool enough. You're not that sort."

Stanton thought about it for a few minutes longer. Then he made up his mind. "It's a deal," he said.

He hadn't expected to find jackals so close to the city, and

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the one that shot from under his feet and scuttled off into the darkness as he dropped over the wall startled him badly.

He crouched in the shadows for several minutes, collecting his wits. To his left he could hear the chatter of the servants outside the tumbledown shacks behind the palace. The main building rose before him blackly against the starry sky.

He began to creep through the undergrowth, pulling on a pair of wash-leather gloves and trying to memorize the sketch-map. After a while he came up against the streaky, plaster-peeling wall and strained his eyes upward until, immediately above him, he made out the bulk of the balcony.

So far, so good. His questing fingers found the crumbling trellis and explored it to see if he could find bits strong enough to take his weight.

Then he heard the girl's voice. It came from the balcony above him. It was English and it had a ripple in it. "Don't do it," the voice said, "or I'll be obliged to shoot you with this ghastly blunderbuss thing."

Stanton, his heart hardly recovered from the shock the jackal had given him, stood gazing wretchedly upward. But before he'd betrayed his presence, the other voice reached him.

This one was a man's and, although the language was English, the intonation wasn't.

"Why the hell are you laughing at me all the time?" it growled.

"Woman's surest defense, Rammy," the woman answered, and added quickly, "Ah-ha, naughty, naughty. Hands off, there's a good boy, or I'll have to whistle for a taxi. You wouldn't like that, would you?"

Stanton leaned against the wall, relief giving way to chagrin. Presumably the damned fool up there knew that Pither had fixed things for tonight. Why the hell did he have to entertain his floosie in this particular room?

The voices receded as the man and the woman appeared to move away from the balcony. Stanton stood there, undecided, and then, after ten minutes or so, gave it up and retraced his steps to the wall.

He was cursing himself in a growling undertone. The whole thing was madness in the first place. Burglary was burglary, however one looked at it. Sure, he lived on the razor's edge of things, and, God knows, he needed money as he'd never needed it before. But up to now he'd managed to stop short of outright crookedness.

To hell with it, he told

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himself. Let the shifty-eyed Pither find another mug. He was through.

He climbed the wall again, walked back across the race-course, and squeezed through the locked turnstile at the entrance. There was a parked taxi outside, and the Sikh driver looked at him curiously as he emerged from the shadows. But there was now no need for secrecy, or even caution, so he crossed to it and told the man to take him to the Star of India Hotel. Common decency dictated that he should tell Pither that the thing was off, and there were the tools and the key to return.

Pither was not there when he arrived. He found his way to a table against the wall, well back from the tiny dance floor, and ordered lime juice.

Where the hell was Pither?

The place was crowded. Hindus mostly, with a sprinkling of Europeans, and across the floor Stanton saw a noisy group of passengers from his ship, obviously being shown the sights of the town by Cleary, the little Liverpool-Irish chief steward.

He waited about half an hour and then started to get impatient. It was almost one o'clock and Pither had said that he would be here from midnight onward.

Stanton looked at his watch for the third time in five minutes, then decided to go. Damn Pither. He'd give Cleary the key in the morning before they sailed and tell him to mail it back to Pither.

He rose and made his way to the door. Cleary called to him as he passed.

"Going back, Mr. Stanton? Sure, we don't sail till mid-morning. Come and join us."

Stanton said, "Thanks, but I think not. Bit tired." He went out.

A taxi slid up to the curb as he emerged from the hotel. He climbed in and said, "Ballard Quay." He sat back against the cushions and began, even now, to choose the words he was going to use when he saw Cleary in the morning.

He could guess what had started it all, of course. The police had seen him aboard in Sydney, but that had been merely because he had smacked that big Greek who had insulted him in Ushers' Bar, and the Greek had gone down heavily. Damn it all, the cops had almost been grateful to him. But quite obviously Cleary had put his own interpretation on it and had assumed he was a professional crook being seen off; and when this lug Pither had come aboard in Bombay in search of somebody to do a

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dirty job for him, Cleary had put Stanton forward as a likely candidate. And he had been mug enough to fall for it.

The taxi slowed down and drew into the shadows near the Gateway of India. Just then a man hurried across the broad pavement, wrenched the door open, and jumped in.

"What the hell goes on?" Stanton demanded.

"Shut up!" warned the other, and Stanton saw that it was Pither. Pither grunted something to the driver and they jerked forward.

"Why weren't you at that hotel as we arranged?" Stanton asked.

"Never mind about that," Pither answered urgently. "What the hell did you have to go and do it for? Damn it all! If I'd wanted a strongarm thug I could have got one here. The last thing I wanted was—"

Stanton turned on him. "Do what for?" he snarled. "I did nothing except wait like a mug under a balcony."

Pither laughed shortly. "You're entitled to tell any tale you like," he said. "Bit pointless trying to put it over on me, though, isn't it? I happen to know you were there, and all I'm trying to do is help. Have it your own way, then." He held out his hand. "You can pass it over since you've got it, though I'm damned if I like handling the stuff now—and naturally I can't pay you the three thousand."

"That's fine then," Stanton said. "Because there's nothing to pass over."

Pither peered at him through the darkness for a long moment. "What exactly do you mean by that?"

"Just that," Stanton told him. "And it's no good looking at me more in sorrow than in anger, either. I didn't do the job. I didn't even go in."

"Naturally," Pither said. "I don't blame you for trying to set up an alibi. But we happened to have a deal, Stanton. Hand it over and the deal stands. I'll send you the three thousand, and you'll sail in the morning and nobody will connect you with it. Try the old malarkey, and it won't be hives you'll suffer from—it'll be a broken neck."

Stanton clenched his fists. "Feeling strong, eh?" he said. "Okay, cocky, stop this cab if you really mean it, and I'll beat the ears off you. I'd enjoy it."

"I don't mean I'll break it." Pither laughed shortly. "They pay a jemadar sweeper thirty rupees a time to do it. In Thana jail."

Stanton stared at him in the gloom. "What the hell are you talking about?"

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"The public hangman."

"Are you nuts?"

Pither laughed harshly. "Never mind about me. It's your position we're discussing. You killed that guy—"

Stanton sat bolt upright. "I *what?*"

"Cut it out, Stanton," Pither said wearily. "We're wasting time."

"Let's waste a bit more and get this perfectly straight. What the hell do you mean?" Stanton demanded.

"Whether you knew it or not, the man's dead now," Pither told him.

Stanton was completely bewildered. "What man?"

"The Maharajah. When you hit him he fell back and caught his head on the corner of that marble table. Why in God's name did you have to do a thing like that?"

"But I didn't hit him!" Stanton shouted. "I didn't hit anybody. I didn't go in, I tell you. I got to the balcony and heard some Indian talking in English to a girl. I waited for some time, then decided not to risk it and came away. That's all there was to it."

"Fine," said Pither drily. "That must let you right out, then. All you've got to do is produce a reliable witness to swear that you didn't go in, and all they'll have on you is attempted burglary."

Stanton felt himself going cold. "What are you trying to do, Pither?" he asked. "Frame me?"

"I'm not trying to do anything except to make you see sense," Pither said. "Why the hell should I try to frame you? All I want to do is to get this business over without getting my own hide singed. If I don't produce those stones to the buyer he's likely to start something underground. A little anonymous chat to headquarters or something."

Stanton felt that he was struggling in some sort of coiling nightmare. "But I haven't *got* the stones," he said.

"Look, Stanton." Pither was having difficulty in controlling his voice. "It came over All-India Radio not forty-five minutes ago, in the last news bulletin. That damned safe was opened with a key, it's empty, there's a dead man there, and the police think a European who was picked up by a taxi outside the racecourse might be able to assist them in their inquiries. Do I have to go any further?"

With a big effort Stanton got control of himself. "Yes, but not much," he said. "Tell the driver to go to headquarters. I'll settle for the attempted burglary."

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"Do you think *they* will? They'll want a conviction, Stanton, and somehow or other I think you'd just about fit. Just look at your own story. Bit pathetic, isn't it?"

"So pathetic that it might just about stand up," Stanton said. "Sorry about your hide, Pither, but it will have to be singed. Stanton tells all."

"Stanton can tell what the hell he likes, but all he'll succeed in doing is balling things up still further," Pither said. "Who engaged you for the job? Man called Pither. Unfortunately for you that doesn't happen to be my name. Where did you meet him? Harbour Bar at the Taj. I've got an alibi. I was out of Bombay all afternoon. Cast-iron. Remember that house dick who waved to us? That was part of the setup. He'll be ready to swear that *you* were there in close consultation with two Indians."

"Cleary recommended me to you—" Stanton began.

"Quite correct," Pither nodded. "But try getting him to testify. He's got his job to think of, remember. And anyhow, he's my man."

"It seems to me you were expecting all this," Stanton said bitterly.

"I wasn't expecting anyone to be bumped off," Pither answered. "But there was always the chance of you being nicked on the job and shooting your mouth off under grilling, so we took a few elementary precautions. You're being a silly fellow, Stanton. You're trying to snaffle the lot. You won't get away with it. Stick to your bargain. You'll be in the clear, and three thousand ahead."

"You don't think I'd run my head against a brick wall just for the hell of it?" Stanton asked. "Search me if you like. I tell you I haven't got them."

Pither laughed shortly. "I'm damned certain you haven't," he said. "I'm putting myself in your place. If I'd pulled the job and wanted to heist the lot, I'd have hidden them somewhere. And I'd come back weeks later to collect them, maybe even years if I thought they were still hot."

"Clever bloke," Stanton said. "But believe it or not, it just wouldn't occur to me to think along those lines. You see, I'm not really a professional, only a damned fool of an amateur who got sucked in in a moment of madness. After all, as you told it, it was merely a case of a fellow robbing himself, and for a good cause." He lunged forward and grabbed both Pither's arms. "All right, off to headquarters, and let's see how this alibi of yours stands up."

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He didn't see the third man in the taxi, crouched down in the darkened well beside the driver's seat. He didn't see anything except a vivid cluster of constellations that danced against the black clouds that enveloped him . . .

He came to on hard cobblestones. He moved his head slowly from side to side and then wished he hadn't. It felt seven sizes too large. He screwed up his eyes against the light and forced himself to rise, then sank down again with a groan as his battered head came into sharp contact with something hard and metallic.

It was the axle of a railway truck, and he saw that he was lying between the rails. He crawled out painfully and found himself on an open jetty. Across a short stretch of water were the familiar sheds of Ballard Quay, and above their roofs the funnel and superstructure of his ship.

Coolies looked at him curiously as he made his way through the dock gates and along the waterfront. His cream suit was stained and dirty and he knew his face and tousled hair must be in keeping with it.

He hurried along the wharf and up the gangway just as the ship's siren bellowed its first departure warning. There were two Indian police inspectors at the top and he felt himself going cold at the bottom of his stomach; but they took no notice of him and got on with their job of shepherding dockside workers off the ship . . .

It was two days later that Cleary spoke to him, covertly, at the darker end of the promenade deck before dinner. He sidled up as Stanton was watching the phosphorescent wake.

The little Irishman was worried. "Ahem," he commenced tentatively. "Have a good time in Bombay, Mr. Stanton?"

Stanton wheeled on him, blazing. "A hell of a good time," he snarled. "I met a swine called Pither. Know him?"

"Er, no. Can't say I do," said Cleary.

"You're a liar," Stanton told him. "It was you who put him on to me. He asked me to do a job for him, then told me some cock-and-bull yarn about a Rajah being murdered. And I swallowed it. There hasn't been a word about it over the radio news."

"Yes, yes," said Cleary hastily, looking round nervously. "Point is, Mr. Stanton, *did* you do the job? I've got a reason for asking."

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"I'll bet you have," Stanton snapped. "Didn't get your cut, eh? You little swab!"

"And that's the truth as I'm standing here," Cleary said earnestly. "And to think of the jobs I've done for him in the past. He was a broadsman—cardsharper, you know—working this line for years. He rooked me, Mr. Stanton."

Stanton looked at him closely. "Yes," he said at length. "I did the job for him. Eighty thousand pounds worth of emeralds. And he rooked me too. All I got was a bash on the bean—so you can stop turning my cabin over every night while I'm at dinner. You're wasting your time."

It was two years later that Stanton met Cleary again, in a pub in the Strand.

"You shouldn't have told me that, Mr. Stanton," said the little man sorrowfully. "Trouble all round and profit for none. I got back to Bombay and beat the hell out of Andrews—Pither to you—and we both get gathered in by the local law and things leaked out proper then. I get fourteen days in the moosh and lose me job, and Andrews gets sent down for two years in Long Bay."

"I wonder who did get the emeralds?" Stanton mused.

"Emeralds, hell," spat Cleary. "The damned things was only glass in the first place. The Rajah's old man had flogged the real ones years ago, but they was always scared the insurance boys would want to have a look at them some time. So they fixed a phony robbery. Things were getting jittery. When you didn't turn up as arranged, the Rajah fixed it himself. Him and the bint he had with him."

A shaft of sunlight pierced the smoky gloom as the little man smiled. "Wouldn't have wished it on a dog," Cleary said.

"Wished what on a dog?"

"Her—Mrs. Andrews that was. Proper nasty piece of work."

"Well suited to Pither—Andrews, or whatever you call him," Stanton said.

"Better suited to the Rajah. That was the first Andrews knew that there was a carrying-on there, and I believe it came as quite a shock—even to him. He divorced her. Her and the Rajah are doing a snake-charming act in a circus sideshow at the moment. He lost his job, too."

There was a long pause as both men thought back over the events of two years before.

Then Cleary lifted his glass. "Down the hatch, Mr. Stanton—and good luck!"

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Dukane—the "now" detective—and the Hollander Case involving a lost 17-year-old hippie, a publisher of nude magazines, a pornographic bookstore—and the scarlet thread of murder . . .

ALL DEBTS OFF

by GARY BRANDNER

CLIFFORD HOLLANDER twisted in an agony of embarrassment as he put the magazine on my desk. The title, in fat letters, was *Naughty*. On the cover two men and two women, all of them nude, cavorted in a tangle of limbs and hair. Little elliptical stickers were coyly pasted over certain parts of the anatomy. I turned a few pages and saw more of the same, only without the labels.

"My daughter is in the series of pictures that starts on page twenty-four," Hollander said.

I found the page. It illustrated the adventures of another frolicsome quartet. "Which one is she?" I asked.

"The dark-haired girl." Hollander's voice was choked. Droplets of sweat popped out on his pale face. He looked like a man about to pass out.

I stepped over to my filing cabinet and took a bottle of brandy from the bottom drawer. I poured a healthy shot and handed it to Hollander. He stared at it for a moment, then knocked it back with a toss of his head. A little of his color returned and the tense lines of his face eased into a shaky smile.

"Thanks, Dukane," he said. "I'll try not to go queasy on you again. It's hard enough for me to look at my daughter like that, but showing it to a stranger—"

"Mr. Hollander," I said, "I'm a private and confidential investigator. Maybe this is the most terrible thing that has ever happened to you. Believe me, I have seen worse." I poured him another brandy and one for myself. "Now, could you go over the story again for me, chronologically this time?"

As Hollander talked I made a few notes while glancing as casually as I could at the photo layout featuring his daughter. She had a pert little face framed by long loose hair. Her body

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was firm and young. The girl's mouth smiled in most of the pictures, but her eyes were empty.

The photography showed a higher level of craftsmanship than was usual in this type of magazine. The lighting was artistically done from unusual angles and the few props were arranged with a sense of balance.

I let Hollander ramble on through his daughter's childhood, which seemed normal enough, and started paying closer attention when he got to the part where she disappeared.

"It was nine months ago, just before her seventeenth birthday," he said. "Beth went off to school one morning as usual and never came back. The police hunted for her for about a month, then we got a letter from her postmarked San Jose. She said she had joined a hippie colony in northern California, was happy, and for us not to try to bring her back. The police lost interest then—I couldn't blame them. My wife and I didn't know what to do except wait and pray that Beth would come home."

"And then you saw this magazine," I prompted, closing the cover over his daughter.

"Yes. One of the boys in her high school class recognized her picture and showed it to his father. The father brought it to me."

On the back cover was the rubber-stamped legend: *Swinger Books & Magazines—Adults Only*. I tapped it with the end of my ballpoint. "Is this where the boy bought it?"

"Yes." Hollander wiped his hands down the creased trousers of his light-gray suit as though to wipe away the feel of the magazine. "Do you think you can find her? If she were truly living with a group of hippies I wouldn't like it, but I couldn't force her to come home if that was the kind of life she wanted. But . . . *this!* She's only seventeen."

I told the man I would do my professional best, and he went on home, leaving the magazine with me. I checked the masthead on the inside of the front cover. The publisher was listed as Meteor Publications, Inc., with a Beverly Hills post-office box number. Anybody could rent a Beverly Hills post-office box.

Again I turned to the pictures of Beth Hollander and studied the smooth young face and the almost-ripe body. I hoped when I found her that her father would still want to thank me.

It was 7:30 when Hollander left my office; he had come into Hollywood after finishing

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his own work day at a Pasadena electronics firm. I rolled the magazine into a tube, stuck it inside my coat, and walked out into the spring evening. An April rain had cleansed the air and gone away, leaving the early stars sparkling like a Walt Disney production.

I got my Chevy out of the lot and drove east on Sunset to Vine Street, then south to Santa Monica Boulevard. I knew where the Swinger Bookstore was. Anybody who drove on Vine Street couldn't miss the huge Day-Glo letters spelling out the name.

I parked in front and walked through the scarlet-painted door. Inside, the store was carpeted in quiet tones and softly lighted. FM music tinkled from hidden speakers. The walls were lined from floor to eye level with racks which held brightly colored magazines similar to the one I had in my pocket. The people and the poses on the covers had a numbing naked sameness about them. Then there were separate racks devoted to specialty magazines for the discerning deviate. Four or five male customers, keeping well apart from each other, peered at the covers with vacant faces. The magazines were sealed in plastic to discourage prolonged browsing.

Next to the door through which I had entered, a muscular youth in a tight black T-shirt sat on a stool behind a high counter. He was pushing the heels of his hands together in some kind of isometric exercise. I took out the copy of *Naughty* and opened it to the spread showing Beth Hollander and friends. I walked over and showed it to the youth, who didn't look so young close up.

"Know anything about the people in these pictures?" I asked.

"We're not allowed to discuss the contents of any of the magazines," he said, pointing to a sign over his head that said roughly the same thing. Then he squinted at the page I was holding out and leaned over to get a better look. "Who wants to know?"

I flapped the magazine shut and told him who I was.

"We have to be awfully careful of the law," the young-old beefcake boy said. "I get off in fifteen minutes. We could talk then."

"Where can I meet you?"

"There's a bar around the corner on Santa Monica called Hardy's Rainbow."

I returned the magazine to my pocket and left my fellow customers wandering through the garden of photographic tidbits.

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Hardy's Rainbow was red vinyl and chrome like a hundred other second-rate bars in and around Hollywood. In this one the chrome was beginning to corrode, and here and there the vinyl had split a seam. I ordered a beer and sat at a table along the wall.

Before long the bookstore clerk came in. He carried a shiny blue jacket over his shoulder à la Paul Newman, with his thumb hooked in the collar. He sat down at my table and ordered a vodka gimlet.

When the waitress left us alone he said, "Sorry I couldn't talk to you back at the store, but they watch us like hawks. The county would just love to close us up for any reason at all. My name is Hillary Starbuck."

"Really?"

"Don't you like it?"

"It's fine. A little too poetic for my taste."

"Well, it isn't my real name, of course, but I do some acting and I thought it would look nice in a theater program. Don't you?"

"No doubt. Now, what about these pictures?" I placed the magazine out in front of him. "Do you know any of the people in them?"

Hillary studied each of the photographs. Then he said, "You know, I never look at these things myself."

"Good for you. Recognize anybody?"

He shook his head. "No. Never saw any of them before."

"You acted as if you spotted somebody back in the bookstore."

"For a minute I thought I did, but I guess I was mistaken."

I closed the magazine. "Do you know anything about the Meteor outfit that publishes this thing?"

"Sure. They put out almost all of these books. Run the stores, too. The office is out in Studio City."

"Who's the boss?"

Hillary looked at me carefully. "A man named Leo Klug. You weren't thinking of going out there tonight, were you?"

"Why not?"

"Just that there wouldn't be anybody there. I can give you the address, though, if you want to go in the morning."

He pulled a card from his wallet and read off a street address which I made a note of. I pocketed my magazine then, dropped a bill on the table, and left Hillary Starbuck to dream his dreams of an acting career. My dreams that night were about flower gardens that erupted into little naked people . . .

Meteor Publications, Inc.

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was a low apple-green building just off Ventura. Neither the landscaped front lawn nor the tasteful reception room gave any clue to the company's product. I told the prim girl at the desk that I wanted to see Mr. Klug. After she examined my card and scolded me for having no appointment she buzzed her machine, listened to her private earphone, and told me it would be about twenty minutes.

I said I would wait and sat down to read the current issue of *Editor & Publisher*, in which everybody had clothes on. After half an hour I was told that Mr. Klug would see me.

Leo Klug sat behind a blond desk in a high-backed swivel chair. He wore a mod-cut suit that didn't go well with his belly and bald head. I was waved into a chair across from him by a sweep of his foot-long cigar.

"So you're a private dick," he said. "First time I ever met one. Want a drink?"

"No, thanks," I said.

"How come? I thought you guys guzzled all day long."

"Not possible," I told him. "That wouldn't leave enough time for getting hit over the head and climbing in the sack with luscious dames."

"Yeah. So what's the beef, Dukane?"

I flapped open the copy of *Naughty*. "I want to locate this girl," I said, tapping Beth Hollander's likeness.

"Are you kidding? Do you think I know one of them broads from another? I got too many other things on my mind. I'm a legitimate businessman."

"Sure you are."

"Don't get salty with me, friend. The magazines I turn out are strictly legal, right down the line. I got an expensive crew of lawyers watching every court decision to make sure I stay this side of trouble. Soft-core pornography, I call it. Get it? So, if you can think of a law I'm breaking, you gotta be smarter than my lawyers."

"How about contributing to the delinquency of a minor? That girl is only seventeen years old."

Klug shrugged. "No skin off mine. Every photographer we buy stuff from signs a release saying that he used professional models, and that they're all over twenty-one. I can't help it if they lie to me sometimes." He blew a cloud of cigar smoke across Beth Hollander's picture to emphasize his total lack of responsibility.

"Can you tell me who the photographer is who did these?"

"Hell, yes. I don't even have to look it up. That's Leslie

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Danzer's work. I spotted it as quality stuff when it came in. Then I saw Danzer's trademark. See that candlestick that shows up in all the pictures? He always used to put that in when he was shooting the top movie stars." Klug flicked a manicured finger across the page. "This is the first I knew he was back in town since the trial. I thought he was up in Frisco."

"What trial?" I asked.

"Hell, man, you mean you don't remember one of the juiciest scandals this town's ever had?"

"I'm a little hazy."

"Actually, the best parts were hushed up at the time, unless you were on the inside." Klug licked his heavy lips and went on. "It seems that Danzer was doing a little candid work on some of his celebrity clients while they were playing their own private games. He had an assistant named Barker who would join in the fun while Danzer snapped away from behind a one-way mirror. Whenever he got in a hole at the track or at Vegas, which was often, he'd sell off a couple of these special prints to the people involved.

"He had a nice little business going until Valerie Marr knocked herself off and left a long note about how she was being blackmailed. Danzer was arrested, but somehow he managed to pin the whole mess on the assistant. The assistant went to the pen and Danzer got off with a suspended sentence. Still, he was finished around Hollywood. That was ten years ago, and people weren't as liberal-thinking as they are now."

"Do you have Danzer's address?" I asked.

Klug leaned forward and studied me with shrewd black eyes. "You say the chick is seventeen?"

"That's right."

He jabbed out the cigar butt which was still seven inches long. "What the hell, I guess Danzer will have to sweat for that. I know I'm not gonna get involved." He went over to a trio of filing cabinets, pulled open a drawer, and walked his stubby fingers over the tabs on the manila folders. "That's funny," he said. "I put it in here myself."

"Something wrong?" I asked casually.

He came to the back of the drawer. "No, here it is. Leave it to the night crew to mess things up." He pulled a sheet from the folder and carried it back to the desk. "Here's Danzer's address, if you want to copy it down."

I wrote out a street number in West Hollywood. "Thanks," I said.

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"That's all right. I'd be sorry to see Danzer put away, because he does good work. But I guess anybody who corrupts young girls like that has got it coming to him. Right?"

I looked closely at Klug's fat face and saw that he was dead-serious. I got out of there before I turned unprofessional and slugged him.

Danzer's address turned out to be a gray stucco court-apartment that dated back before World War II. The photographer's bungalow was at the bottom of the square U formed by the court. None of the neighbors was in sight—only a three-color cat that paused in her morning bath for an uncurious glance at me.

I punched the button beside Danzer's door and heard the angry buzz inside. I waited and listened. No footsteps, but I could hear a familiar TV commercial for a kitchen cleanser. I pushed the buzzer again, but the prickling hairs on the back of my neck told me nobody was going to open that door. I looked to see that the court was still empty and then tried the door. It was unlocked.

I walked in. It was the standard living room-bedroom-kitchen setup. The furniture had been cheaply recovered. On the screen of a portable TV set several small-time celebrities grinned like crazy at the camera while they played some silly game with balloons.

The only man in the room was stretched on the floor with his face buried in the carpet. A black-brown stain had spread out from both sides of his midsection.

The man wore a pair of wrinkled khaki pants and last week's shirt. He was barefoot. I knelt and touched his forearm. It was cold and rubbery, and stiffened into its outflung position. A beatup wallet stuck out of his hip pocket. I lifted it and saw there was some $30 inside and a couple of cards identifying the bearer as Leslie M. Danzer.

I put the wallet back and walked into the bedroom. The bed was neatly made with a red blanket serving as a spread. Two drawers of the dresser were open and empty. The others held clean but unironed men's clothes. One corner of the bedroom was curtained off with a heavy black fabric. Behind the curtain was dark-room equipment and a couple of expensive-looking cameras.

In the bathroom the medicine cabinet over the sink was open and the contents in disarray. The bath towel hanging over the shower curtain showed traces of flesh-colored

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makeup. Several strands of long dark hair were pasted to the sink.

Back in the living room I found the L.A. Yellow Pages lying on the sofa, open to *Taxicabs*.

I closed the telephone book, but otherwise left the apartment as I had found it. The court was still empty. Even the calico cat was gone.

From a booth on Fairfax I called the cab company with the largest ad in the Yellow Pages and talked to the dispatcher, a man I had dealt with before. After a wait of several minutes he came back on the line to tell me a girl had been picked up at the intersection nearest to Danzer's place at 2:30 that morning and delivered to an apartment hotel in Hollywood. I thanked him and hung up.

The Sunrise Apartment Hotel advertised low weekly rates in big letters painted on the side of the building. The desk clerk was busy examining his face in a magnifying shaving mirror. He pulled his attention away long enough to give me the room number of a young woman who had registered early that morning as Mary Johnston.

I got to her door just as she was coming out carrying a scuffed suitcase. I recognized the pert face and loose dark hair. She wore a pair of hip-hugging flared slacks and a soft yellow blouse.

"Going somewhere, Beth?" I said.

The girl looked at me from eyes that had liver-colored patches below them. She held herself rigid for a moment, then sagged against the plaster wall.

"Are you from the police?" she said.

"I'm a private investigator working for your father. Are you all right?"

"Maybe I'd better sit down for a minute."

We went into her room where she sank into an upholstered chair. I pulled a wooden one over from the writing desk and sat facing her.

"I don't suppose you've got any reds," she said.

"Sorry. The best I can do is a cigarette."

"I'll take one of those, then."

I lit the cigarette for Beth Hollander and she pulled the smoke deep into her lungs as though it were a disinfectant.

"What happened at Danzer's apartment?" I said.

"I didn't kill him."

"I didn't think you did. But you were there and you left in a hurry. Tell me about it."

The girl spoke in a toneless voice. Her eyes were flawed

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glass that filtered the emotion. She said, "I was living with Leslie Danzer. I've been with him since he found me in the Haight-Ashbury a month after I left home."

"Were you in love with him?" I asked.

"He disgusted me. I wanted to scream every time he touched me."

"Why did you stay with him, Beth?"

"It isn't easy to explain. First, you have to know that all my life my parents have given me everything I wanted. Yes, including love. I took it all as though I had it coming, and paid them back nothing. Worse than nothing—I paid them back by running away. And what I ran to you wouldn't believe. In that first month I sank right into the sewer. I found out what kind of animals have moved in where the flower children were—if there really ever were any flower children.

"Leslie found me when I had hit bottom and took me to his place where I got some of the sewer stink off me. Oh, I know he didn't do it for any humanitarian reason—he had plans for me. But that didn't matter, you see. He did save me. And it did give me a chance to pay somebody back for doing something for me. To pay everybody back, really."

"How long did you plan to keep it up?" I asked.

"Until I knew in my heart that we were even. Then I could leave him. Not before."

The girl fell silent then and stared at a blank patch of wall. Something she saw there made her shudder. I lit another cigarette and handed it to her. She took it and went on in the same flat voice.

"Leslie had me write a letter to my parents and he mailed it from San Jose in case the police were looking for me. Then he brought me back to L.A. with him. He heard they were paying good prices for nude pictures." Her young mouth turned down in an ugly grimace. "I had to do some things that made me throw up afterwards. But I still felt I owed it to him."

"All debts off now," I said.

"I guess so. When I came back to the apartment this morning from work—I take a relief waitress job when I can get it—I found Leslie dead—murdered. I panicked and gathered up all my clothes and bathroom stuff and called a cab. I couldn't have been too clever if you found me this fast."

"Not so very," I agreed. "And the police won't be far behind. You're going to need a lawyer, and right away. What do you say I take you home?"

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"Home?" She held the word on her tongue, tasting it gingerly.

"To your father."

"I guess there isn't any place else, is there?"

"Sure there is—jail."

Maybe that was harsh, but it snapped the girl out of her self-pity. I called Hollander at his office and filled him in rapidly on the situation. He said he would be at their home in Pasadena when I got there with his daughter. Beth and I drove the twenty miles in silence.

I delivered the girl to a big comfortable house where Hollander was waiting in the doorway. Then I got out of there in a hurry. Emotions were straining to come out from behind the civilized masks that the father and daughter wore. It was not a scene that called for an audience.

It was past noon, and I wanted a drink badly. But I had one more stop to make before I was finished with the Hollander case.

The customers in the Swinger Bookstore could have been the same men who were there the day before. They were all careful not to look directly at me as I walked in. That was one of the fraternity rules. Hillary Starbuck, aspiring young-old actor, presided as before on his stool behind the counter. I walked up close and let him recognize me.

"Oh, hi there," he said in a fair approximation of surprise. "Did you find Leo Klug?"

"I found him. I also found a murdered man in West Hollywood."

Hillary licked his lips and didn't seem to like the taste. "Look, I'm not supposed to talk to the customers."

"I'm not a customer, Hillary," I said. "But why don't we use your real name? It's Barker, isn't it?"

He blinked his long eyelashes half a dozen times, and for a minute I thought he was going to cry. Finally he said softly, "Yes, I'm Tod Barker."

"I suppose you recognized your old boss Leslie Danzer's work in those pictures I showed you yesterday. I thought it was one of the people you spotted, but it was the candlestick trademark, wasn't it?"

"That's right," he said. "I couldn't mistake Leslie's style."

"And you were anxious to see him before I scared him off, so you didn't tell me about the night shift out at Meteor Publications. You probably called there right after I left you last night and got Danzer's address."

"Yes. I know a fellow who works there. He found it for me

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in the file." A restraint seemed to snap somewhere inside Barker and then the words tumbled out. "I spent eight years in prison because of Leslie Danzer. Maybe you know about that. For a few months he wrote to me and said his lawyers were working hard to get me out. He owed me that much. After all, I got all the blame for him at the trial. But then he stopped writing, and I knew it was all a lie about his helping me.

"During the years after that all I thought about was getting a chance to hurt him the way he'd hurt me. But when I got out of prison I couldn't find him. Nobody knew where he'd gone. I spent two years looking and finally gave up and took this job. Then you showed me those pictures."

As Barker's voice rose, the customers looked over, startled, and self-consciously they edged out the door.

I said, "And when you found out where he lived you went there and killed him."

"Yes. Can you imagine . . . he greeted me at the door like an old friend. As though nothing was wrong, as though nothing ever had been. He invited me inside and was talking to me and smiling when I put the knife into him."

"You'd better lock up the store now," I said. "I'll give you a lift downtown."

When I finished with the police and got home it was late in the afternoon. I rinsed my mouth out with salt water, then I poured three fingers of bourbon into a glass and drank it quickly. I built another one, adding ice cubes and a little water this time. I took the drink into the bathroom with me and sipped at it while I soaked in a steaming tub. It was a long, long time before I felt clean again.

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DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

This is the 352nd "first story" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine . . . a "first story" that goes forward and upward in a straight line—well, not quite straight . . .

When we purchased Michael J. Carroll's first story, he was 26 and married to Donna for six years; they have one child, a daughter named Diana. Although Mr. Carroll has an M.S. in Pure Mathematics, writing has "always been a major interest." A few months before he submitted "Man and Boy," Mr. Carroll, until then a teacher, "severed all his ties with the academic future by turning down any teaching position for the following year." He "farmed out" his wife as a psychology teacher to Mount Saint Mary's College for Women in New Hampshire—as he puts it, "just in case."

His other interests include classical music, gourmet cooking, reading ("anything—a book a day"), duplicate bridge, chess, tennis, swimming, playing the flute—and oh, yes, he is also a balletomane. Sounds like a 26-hour day, eight days a week . . .

MAN AND BOY

by MICHAEL J. CARROLL

THERE'S NO WARNING—none at all. I'm stopped at a red light. The door on the passenger side opens and someone gets in. He has a gun in his hand.

"Don't move, mister. Don't move an inch or you're dead."

I freeze.

"Hey, Wayne," says another voice. "This door's locked."

The man in the front seat twists around carefully, his eyes and gun both on me.

"Just keep still, mister."

I do nothing. The button to the rear door clicks as he pulls it up. I look cautiously in the rearview mirror. The rear door is open and someone is putting a suitcase in the back seat.

"Hey," says the voice in the

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rear, "there's a kid back here."

Front Seat twists his head sideways, glances quickly behind him, then back at me, too quick for me to do anything. "Just get in," he says. "He's not going to bite you."

The other one gets in and closes the door. He's sitting next to the door and I can just see him in the mirror. He, too, has a gun.

"The light's green, mister," says Front Seat. "Let's go."

"Straight?"

"Straight." Back Seat laughs. "Yeah, let's go straight. You hear that, Wayne? Let's go straight. You hear that?"

"I hear it, I hear it. Cool it a while, huh?"

I keep my eyes on the road.

"Hey, mister," says Back Seat, "what's the matter with the kid? He sick or something?"

"He's sick."

"What are you talking about?" asks Front Seat.

"This kid, he's just laying there like he's dead or something."

"He's under medication," I explain.

"You taking him to a doctor?" asks Front Seat.

"I *was*."

"Yeah, that's right, you was. But not no more."

"Now look—"

"Shut up, mister, or your kid won't ever get anywhere."

I glance sideways. Front Seat hasn't moved. The gun is still in his hand.

"Watch the road," he says.

I watch the road.

"Follow the signs to Route Three."

"How old's your kid?" asks Back Seat.

"Six."

"What's your name, mister?" asks Front Seat.

"Hanson," I reply. "Tim Hanson."

"Well, Mr. Hanson, I'm pleased to make your acquaintance. I'm Wayne, and that there in the back seat's Clark. Wayne and Clark, Mr. Hanson. We're a team."

I say nothing.

"Maybe you've heard of us?"

"No."

"Hey, Clark, get that. He hasn't heard of us. You sure of that, mister? Wayne and Clark. You sure you ain't heard of us?"

"Yes."

"Say, that's pretty good. You hear that, Clark?"

"I heard."

"You want to know why that's good, mister?"

"Wayne," says Back Seat. His voice seems to contain a note of warning.

"Relax, no sweat, man."

"*I'm* relaxed. Why don't you stop gabbing?"

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"Say, Hanson, this radio of yours work?" Front Seat is a compulsive talker.

"No," I answer. He fiddles with it anyway, using his left hand. I look in the mirror. Back Seat has his gun in his hand. He's watching me carefully.

"Which way?" I ask.

"Huh?"

"We're almost to Route Three. Which way? North or South?" I slow the car down.

"North," directs Front Seat. "Then you'll take the second exit. From there you follow the signs to Fletcher's Pond."

"Hey, Hanson," says Back Seat, "your kid is snoring. That mean anything?"

"Yeah," laughs Front Seat, "it means he's sleeping."

"It's the medicine," I say.

"What's your kid's name?" asks Front Seat.

"Robert."

"Robert. You call him that? Or Bobby?"

"Bobby."

"I tell you, Hanson, I guess it's kind of good Bobby's asleep. I mean this could frighten him quite a bit, couldn't it, sort of a shock like, huh?"

"I imagine so."

"You *imagine* so. You know, Hanson, I think you're taking this awfully calm like. You wouldn't be planning something, would you?"

"No."

"That's smart of you, Hanson. If you mean it. I want to believe you. I really do. I mean, I could convince you how smart it is, but I'd rather not waste the time. Understand?"

"I understand."

"Exit coming up, Hanson. Don't miss it. You're doing real good. As I said, I'm glad you understand."

I take the exit gradually. My eyes flick to the sideview mirror. No police around. Only a few cars on the road.

"Take it nice and easy, Hanson. You have a nice car. You wouldn't want it messed up now, would you?"

He glances to the back seat, his eyes sweeping the interior, but he is really keeping his eyes on me. There is nothing I can do.

"You keep your car nice and clean," continues Front Seat. "I like clean cars, with their seats clean and all. I wouldn't want to mess it up any."

"I told you," I say, "I'm not going to try anything."

"I know that, Hanson, and—as I told you—I want to believe you. But it's kind of hard. I get this bad feeling about you. You keep looking around too much and that makes me nervous. I kind of get the feeling you don't really take

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me seriously. Let me tell you something which might improve our understanding. I just killed a man."

"Wayne!" says Back Seat.

"Shut up! What the hell does it matter what I say, huh?"

Back Seat leans back, but he seems to hold the gun a little tighter. I continue driving, my hands slippery on the wheel.

"I just killed a man, Hanson. You know why? He got in my way. Kind of a stupid reason, really, but I don't like people getting in my way."

We enter a dirt road, narrow and tree-lined, with many deep ruts. My seat belt is fastened. I look in the mirror. Back Seat's eyes are fixed on me.

"Even if you hit a tree," says Back Seat, "one of us is going to get you."

I drive a little slower.

"He's right, Hanson," says Front Seat. "Now me, I've only killed one man. So far. Clark, though, like he has a regular list. Except he doesn't use a gun. Show him, Clark."

"That can wait."

"Clark boy, I want this man *convinced*. I want him a real believer. Now, there's that cute little Bobby in the back seat and my finger's on the trigger, so he's not going to try nothing. Show it."

I look up at the rearview mirror. Back Seat is holding a long stiletto-like knife in front of his face, his eyes seeming to look through it. I jerk my vision back to the road. The car bumps along.

"I've found, Hanson," says Front Seat, "that people can live a long time while they're being hurt, even a little kid. These kids have a lot of strength—youth and all that, you know. I guess it's due to clean living and all that good rich young blood, huh?"

I'm trying to say something, but I can't.

"Say, Hanson, you want Clark back there should give you a free demonstration?"

"For God's sake leave the kid alone!" I'm speaking fast, the words slurring together. "He doesn't even know what's going on."

"Now that's better, Hanson. You had me worried for a while. You didn't seem worried enough about that kid of yours."

"Just leave him alone."

"Why, Hanson, I'm sure I will, but it's really up to you. But I'm not worried. Just so long as *you* are, Hanson, I'm not."

My hands are gripping the wheel. I feel the moisture accumulating under my arms and running down my back.

The road is a poor one. My

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body is jarred by the bumping.

"A little slower, Hanson. We're in no hurry," says Front Seat.

I ease my foot off the accelerator.

Front Seat keeps talking. "No hurry at all. We have all the time in the world. You know, Hanson, they say time is money. Well, as I said, we've got all the time in the world."

I cannot help asking, "How much did you get?"

"So you know, do you?" asks Front Seat.

"How could he help it," says Back Seat, "with you jabbering all the time."

"It was only a *small* bank," Front Seat says, "but today's Friday. You know what happens on Friday?"

"What?" I ask.

"This bank's part of a shopping center, a mall. And every Friday afternoon all the stores send their money to the bank."

"And that's what you have in the suitcase?" I ask.

"Are you kidding? Man, if we took all that stuff it would fill up this car, all that dumb small stuff and checks—hell of a lot of checks. Naw, what we have is the big stuff—tens and up, all the stuff the people got change for in the stores. Thirty thousand at least."

"Not much, is it?" I say.

Suddenly Front Seat is furious. "What the hell does that mean?" He leans toward me, gun lowering. My foot tenses. I am edging it toward the brake.

"Cool it, Wayne. Now!" There is a sudden note of authority in Back Seat's voice. I jerk in surprise. Front Seat leans back, his gun covering me again.

"Poke the kid, Clark," he says.

"No!" I shout.

"Poke him!"

"Take it easy, Wayne. He hasn't done anything."

"But he was going to."

"I'm sorry," I say. "I didn't mean anything."

"Don't kid me, mister. You were trying some trick, trying to distract me. Weren't you?"

"No." My voice breaks.

"You lying son of a—"

"Wayne! Drop it."

"Okay, I'll drop it. But you hear me, mister, I want you to keep quiet. And I mean quiet. Understand?"

I drive in silence.

A quick glance in the mirror shows me that Back Seat has his gun in his hand, carefully aimed.

I have to say something. "Look, what are you going to do to the kid?"

"I told you to shut up," says Front Seat.

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A minute passes.

"The kid will be okay," says Front Seat. "You'll both be okay if you don't give me any trouble."

"I don't care what you do to me. Just leave the boy alone."

"Slow down, mister," says Front Seat. "Our turnoff is coming up."

An even smaller road leads off to the right. I steer the car onto the road slowly. Both of them are watching me closely.

"Let the boy off here," I say. "Someone will find him."

"Mister, you're nuts. I thought your kid was sick. Hell, mister, no one will find him way out here. Look. Relax. You're getting too worried about your kid. You might try something stupid and that wouldn't do either of you a damn bit of good."

The road comes to an end in front of a cabin.

I stop the car. Back Seat gets out. Front Seat is covering me with the gun. I sit still. Back Seat carries the suitcase into the cabin.

He comes out. Back Seat opens my door cautiously. He is pointing a gun at me. "Okay, Wayne, get out your side."

Front Seat gets out.

"Out," he says, pointing his gun at me across the seat. "Nice and slow."

I get out.

Front Seat walks around the car. They are both pointing their guns at me.

"Now?" asks Front Seat.

"No," answers Back Seat.

"Why not? No one's going to hear anything way out here."

"Who knows? It's safer inside."

"Please," I say. My voice is shaking. "Leave the boy alone. Please don't hurt him."

"Get your kid out, Hanson," Back Seat says.

"Please!"

"*Now*, Hanson."

I turn around and open the rear door. I bend down and pick up the small sleeping child, small for his six years. My right hand is reaching under the blankets, searching.

I stand up slowly, holding the boy, my right hand beneath his blankets.

"No tricks now, Hanson, or your kid's the one who gets it first."

"Inside the cabin, Hanson," says Back Seat, swinging his gun in that direction.

His first moment of carelessness.

I shoot Front Seat in the chest, then pull the gun free of the blankets.

Back Seat is swinging his gun back toward me, but he's off balance when he shoots.

I shoot him dead center.

"Hold it!" Front Seat is on

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the ground, his gun aimed up at me, his other hand over his chest. "Don't move that gun or the kid's dead."

"Don't shoot," I say. I turn the gun toward him. He's in pain and in an awkward position. I shoot him again.

I make sure they're both dead, then I check the boy. He's okay. I put him back in the car, gently.

My hands are shaking.

I drag the bodies into the cabin. I bring the suitcase out with me and put it in the back seat with the boy.

Later I'm in a phone booth, dialing a number. I look at the car, parked next to the booth. The boy is still unconscious.

A woman answers.

"Mrs. Walters?" I ask. "I have something very important to tell you, so please listen carefully. I have your son, Jimmy. If you want him back—alive—you will have to"—And I tell her how much the ransom will be.

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"My reading added other things," he continued. "AS YOU LIKE IT *suggested the seven ages of man; Dr. Faustus, the seven deadly sins;* THE PICTURE OF DORIAN GRAY *and* DR. JEKYLL AND MR. HYDE, *the double nature of man, the difference between appearance and reality" . . . an unusual story—one you won't soon forget . . .*

THE TOTAL PORTRAIT

by J. F. PEIRCE

SOME DAYS STAND OUT in our lives more than others. For me such a day was a Friday in May of 1952. The mail that day brought only one thing of interest—an envelope addressed to me in care of my publisher. Inside were a round-trip plane ticket to Santa Fe and an address. Nothing more.

I was at loose ends at the moment, ready for a vacation, for something different. But even if I'd been in the midst of something big, I would have gone. My curiosity would have made me. I called the airline, checked the afternoon flight, then started to pack.

William Randolph Hearst had died at the end of April, and I had cranked out a biography of that multifaceted man in less than two weeks. At the time I was caught up in a racket that might be called "instant journalism." I had got into it six years before when one of the paperback publishers had hired me to write a book on Van Meegeren, the artist who had counterfeited Vermeer's paintings during the war. The publisher had given me just two weeks to knock out 50,000 words.

Remember the multitude of books that came out after Eichmann was captured, after Eisenhower died, after the Kennedys and Martin Luther King were assassinated? There were a dozen on the newsstands about each of them within a matter of weeks. That's instant journalism.

In most cases you've never heard of the authors. And for good reason. Nobody in his right mind would write such a book. It's killing to body and mind, and most of all, to spirit. Some are "committee" jobs, the work of a dozen writers

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published under a single pseudonym. But most are a paste-and-scissors patchwork of clippings from articles and other books. The editor who hired me told me how to go about it.

I hired a couple of college students to comb the libraries for newspaper and magazine articles about Van Meegeren, then read and regurgitated them, half digested, into a dictaphone for a secretary to type up. I didn't even correct the galleys. The editor did that himself.

After it was over and I'd had a chance to catch my breath I asked the editor, "Why me?"

"Because of the book you wrote on Vermeer," he answered.

Because of a book published five years before, a book that had sold exactly 167 copies, 59 of which I'd bought at a remainder price to give to relatives and friends. Actually it was a rewrite and expansion of my college thesis that a publisher, now no longer in business, had mistakenly seen fit to print.

At any rate, searching for a writer, the editor had looked up books and articles on Vermeer, seen my name on a number of them (I'd written articles on Vermeer for art magazines, too), and obtained my address from one of the magazines. It was as simple as that.

My book, *Van Meegeren, Counterfeiter or Collaborator?*, came out in record time, before I'd even had a chance to spend my advance—which, as it turned out, was the only payment I received for it. After that I made it a practice to write all such books for a flat fee, paid in advance.

The address I'd been given was that of a house hidden in the foothills some distance from Santa Fe. At first glance it looked like any other adobe dwelling, but up close it turned out to be a dun-colored concrete building that resembled a small fort. Its massive oak door was decorated with wrought iron, but the metal seemed more for reenforcement than ornamentation.

As I was about to knock, the door was opened by a little man with quick, precise movements. I started to introduce myself, but before I could say anything he said, "Come in, Mr. Reynolds," and my mouth was still open as I entered. Obviously he was expecting me, but he had no way of knowing exactly when I would arrive. For that matter, I could have cashed in the ticket and pocketed the money.

He gestured to a chair and

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said, "Coffee—black," and then disappeared through an archway before I could answer.

I glanced about. What little furniture there was seemed lost in the room. I was reminded of the home of a friend who had built too big a house, then couldn't afford to furnish it. Though there was no north window it was obviously an artist's studio. The light for painting was artificial, spotlights and the like. A small painting was clamped in an easel at the far side of the room, near a huge stone fireplace.

I crossed to examine the painting, expecting it to be a work in progress, but was surprised to discover that it was of the man who had admitted me, my host, showing him some five or six years younger.

Though I'd never seen the painting before, it was irritatingly familiar. Then recognition came with a sudden shock. The painting had the same style and composition as a Vermeer, the same palette and patina, the same brush strokes. It was the work of an artist who could have forged a Vermeer painting. I wondered if he would have tried it if Van Meegeren had not anticipated him and been caught.

"From your expression," my host said beside me, "I can tell that you've added two plus two and come up with five."

I hadn't heard him return.

I looked at him more closely. He was wearing a T-shirt with horizontal blue and white stripes, blue denim trousers, and navy-colored canvas slippers. His face, his hands, his clothes were flecked all over with paint, reminding me slightly of the pointillist style.

I judged him to be five two (I towered over him) and to weigh at most 120. He had curly black hair and eyes of an unbelievable cornflower blue that looked as though some artist had painted them.

His face was unlined, as if he never used it or as if it were a mask that he hid behind to keep from revealing his emotions. His complexion beneath the flecks of pigment was a pasty white. I took him to be one of the night people. He looked 35, but I know now that he was my own age—40.

He handed me a cup of coffee and I thanked him.

"I'm Sloan Frazier," he said, his voice as expressionless as his face.

I recognized the name. In fact, I'd seen examples of his work. He painted portraits of society women and their children for substantial fees. In his own way he was the same kind of artistic hack I was.

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"As you can see," he said, nodding toward the self-portrait, "I'm out of step with my time. I paint with skill and precision at a time when shapeless daubs suggest more to mindless men than beauty or reality."

His speech sounded memorized. I'm not sure now what he went on to say, but there was no question in my mind that he'd taught himself to paint like Vermeer only to be foiled by Van Meegeren's arrest and exposure, a victim not so much of the time as of timing.

"What do you want of me?" I asked when he seemed unable to come to the point.

For answer he said, "Let me show you," and crossing the room, he drew back a curtain of beige monk's cloth that covered one entire wall.

I had assumed that the curtain shut out the light from a tier of windows overlooking the valley below, but instead it concealed a miniature art gallery: seven paintings of uniform size and shape, all masks. And when he turned on the overhead lights I realized with a shock of surprise that they were all of *me*. Seven portraits of me at different ages from childhood to old age.

These paintings were not "Vermeers," but sophisticated, multi-colored "Rorschach tests" in which the viewer saw not only what was on the surface of the canvas but also what was hidden in the convolutions of the subconscious mind. The colors had been laid on heavily with a palette knife, and the hard light on the built-up layers of paint cast subtle shadows, giving the masks a three-dimensional effect that added to their air of mystery, to what one saw or thought he saw.

I was standing before a mask of me during my years in the Army, shortly after my wife's death. I could recall no other painting exactly like it, yet it was similar to several made at the time—or rather, like a pastiche of all of them combined.

Frazier gestured toward three connected lines, like a V with a flat bottom, painted on the floor in front of each picture, then said, "Each line is at the right distance from the paintings to give the best view."

I was standing on the center line, the flat bottom of the V.

"Move to the diagonal line on the left," Frazier commanded.

I did as directed and a second mask came into focus, and I was shocked to see myself as a beast of prey, cruelty and evil underlining every feature.

"That's me?" I said.

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Instead of answering, Frazier gestured to the diagonal line to my right. I moved, and as my toes touched the line, a third mask of myself at that age came into focus. This mask gave me the look of a poet, a version of myself I found easier to rationalize.

I stepped forward, to the picture, and discovered that it was not one painting but three. Ribs of some rigid material had been attached to the surface of the canvas and both sides of the ribs were painted, so that looking at the picture head-on I saw one mask—the ribs disappearing from view—and looking at it from the right or left I saw another mask, painted on the sides of the ribs. From the middle line the ribs seemed to merge, to form a solid plane. And though each of the three masks was different from the other two, all three were clearly related.

"You're wondering what it means," Frazier said.

"Yes, though I suppose each portrait represents me at a given age and that all seven represent my entire life. Shakespeare's seven ages of man."

"Right. But there's more to them than that. The mask seen from the left of each portrait represents your physical or animal nature at that age—which of the seven deadly sins possessed you or will possess you and to what degree. The mask seen from the right represents your esthetic or spiritual nature. The two together shape the center portrait—you as others see you, as you perhaps see yourself, your good and evil qualities blended in the role you play."

As Frazier talked I sipped my coffee and studied each of the paintings in turn, comparing them with what I knew, or thought I knew, about myself at the period depicted. I could feel Frazier's gaze on me as he watched my reactions, saw the shocks of recognition that jolted me as I discovered things that I had not known about myself, but that I now knew to be true from the insights which the paintings gave me.

The center portrait of me as a schoolboy was the Buddha-like mask I'd presented to the world at that time. The same painting seen from the left was Gluttony incarnate—I had been extremely fat as a boy; whereas the one seen from the right showed a thin, intense, owlish youth, old before his time.

Frazier put my thoughts into words. "Who was it who said, 'Inside every fat man is a thin man screaming to get out'?"

I shrugged and moved along the line. The center mask of the fifth portrait resembled me to a

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marked degree, still it wasn't me. It had a leonine cast foreign to my countenance.

"It doesn't look like me," I protested.

"It will. It will," Frazier answered.

Gertrude Stein had said as much about the portrait Picasso had painted of her and he had replied in kind. And in time she had grown to look like her portrait. Could this happen to me, I wondered.

The center painting of the final portrait showed me as an old man looking into space, into nothingness. No, not nothingness. Into Hell. I shivered.

"I—*it* looks almost insane," I said.

"Almost?" Frazier said mockingly.

I remembered an episode from the autobiography of Arnold Genthe, the photographer who took the famous photographs of the San Francisco earthquake. He wrote of seeing the philosopher Nietzsche in old age, sitting in a room staring into space, obviously insane, and described him as looking like an eagle who had flown too near the sun.

Though I swear I did not speak aloud, Frazier summed up what I'd been thinking: "Like Icarus who flew too near the sun—and fell," he said.

I turned and stared at him a moment dumbly, but his expression told me nothing, and I returned to my study of the paintings. Teilhard de Chardin said, "Give a man a mask, and he will tell you all about himself." Give him many masks which he can hide behind, I thought, and he will reveal his whole world.

"What gave you the idea for all this?" I asked.

"Many things," Frazier answered. "The original suggestion came from a visit I made to a palace in Sicily. The nobleman who built it was a hunchback, the butt of much cruel humor. To revenge himself he had his garden decorated with statues of those who had taunted and ridiculed him, each statue in some way deformed to reveal the human weaknesses, the secret vices, the hidden humps, of the person represented."

How many hidden humps did Frazier have, I wondered.

"My reading added other things," he continued. "*As You Like It* suggested the seven ages of man; *Dr. Faustus*, the seven deadly sins; *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, the double nature of man, the difference between appearance and reality."

"But how did you get to know me?" I demanded. "From

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reading about me? From my work? How were you able to portray me at so many ages? From photographs that show what I am or was, from pictures of my family that show what I might become? And how did you get such photographs?"

Frazier smiled, but with his eyes only.

"Would you believe me if I said it was ESP?" he asked.

"No."

"Too bad. Because that's the answer."

"It would be easier to believe you're in league with the devil."

He cocked his head to one side as if considering the possibility.

"That, too," he said matter-of-factly.

Everything about him made me angry though I tried not to show it. Of course what really angered me was that this stranger knew more about me than I knew about myself, that he had revealed things to me I had hidden from myself.

At last, unable to control myself any longer, I all but shouted, "Either you're a con man or a blackmailer! I don't know which."

"Not a great artist?" he said, pretending to be hurt.

"What do you want of me?" I demanded. "Why did you choose me for your victim?"

"Because I want you to write up what I'm doing—painting a portrait of the total man, from birth to death. One that reflects what he was, what he is, what he will become. A series of revelations."

"So that he can change if he doesn't like what he sees?"

I hadn't liked much of what I'd seen in my portraits.

Frazier shrugged. "I don't believe one can change," he said.

"You're a fatalist?"

"No. I just don't believe one can change his basic character. Not to any significant degree. I think that once you establish what you are, you can't change what you'll become."

"I see."

"Do you?" he said contemptuously.

My anger flared again. I raised my arm to strike out at him, then remembered what I'd seen in one of the paintings, and the movement metamorphosed into a gesture toward the painting. "You give me the look of a murderer," I said. "I don't consider myself capable of committing murder."

Frazier glanced at the portrait of me as a soldier.

"Oh, I've killed," I said, "but that was war—impersonal. I had no choice. It was kill or be killed. I regret it now. But at the time I didn't think about

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it much—it had to be done."

"But you didn't try to avoid doing it. You weren't a conscientious objector."

"No," I confessed. "In fact, I enlisted. If I hadn't I might never have been taken." Not wanting to think about it I changed the subject. "What you really want of me," I said, "is an advertisement—to sell your paintings."

"Not one. Several."

Again he smiled with his eyes only, and something told me to stay out of it; but it was too good a story. I finished my coffee and set the cup on the stone mantelpiece.

"Say I do," I said, "what's in it for me?"

"You've already decided."

It was true. I couldn't deny it.

"How much do you want for these?" I asked, making a sweeping gesture to take in all the paintings.

"Three thousand each," he answered without hesitation, "or twenty thousand for all seven."

I sucked in my breath involuntarily.

"Or I'll make you a complete set of color photographs for two hundred and you can use them to illustrate your articles."

I started to shake my head—but instead, I nodded. . .

The articles were duly written and illustrated with selected views from the 21 photographs. And the articles sold without difficulty to expensive, limited-circulation magazines subscribed to by the very rich—men in big business, international society, and government who could afford portraits that sold for a minimum of $20,000.

Six months passed before the first of the articles was published. By then I was in the Culion leper settlement in the Philippines undergoing treatment for leprosy, which I had apparently contracted in the South Pacific during the war. I was in Japan doing a series on Oriental art when I took ill. Actually the symptoms had appeared in me two years earlier, but my physician being unfamiliar with the disease had treated me for tuberculosis, which it resembles. The symptoms had been mild, and neither of us had taken them seriously.

But in Japan I had an acute attack, and the doctor the hotel recommended recognized the symptoms immediately and made arrangements for me to go at once to Culion.

During my first few years there I failed to respond to treatment. My condition got worse and I became weaker and

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weaker from recurrent inflammation of the kidneys. Then, slowly, I began to recover, and after years of treatment with the highly toxic drug dapsone, I was finally pronounced cured and permitted to return home.

This is not the place for a detailed account of either leprosy or its treatment; therefore, I will merely catalogue its effects on me. Discolored patches appeared on my skin. My eyebrows fell out. My nose and ears became thickened and enlarged, my nails, hard and clawed. My breathing and speech were impaired, and I experienced a loss of sensation and muscular power. Fortunately, on my recovery, I regained most of my natural resistance.

During my eleven years at Culion I devoted my time to study and writing. Among other things I wrote a book, *Mask of the Lion*, in which I discussed leprosy and described my own leonine appearance. The money I received from this writing, along with a small inheritance from my parents, enabled me to be self-supporting.

On my return to the United States early in February 1964 I picked up the mail that had been held for me by my publisher, including copies of the magazines that had printed my writings. Thumbing through these magazines, I came across one of the articles I'd done on Frazier. Over the years I had forgotten all about him. Now memory came flooding back, for the picture that illustrated the article could have served as the dust-jacket illustration for my book, *Mask of the Lion*. I shivered. I had grown to look like Frazier's painting.

I remembered standing in front of the original in Frazier's studio and saying, "It doesn't look like me," and Frazier's matter-of-fact reply: "It will. It will." And again I shivered.

What had happened to Frazier, I wondered. I had been cut off from the world, true, but if his paintings had made any sort of splash, surely the waves would have reached me.

I crossed to the telephone, but calls to editors and collectors brought me no information. Most of them remembered reading my articles on Frazier, but none recalled hearing anything further about him. I even tried getting Frazier's telephone number, but if he had a phone, the number was unlisted.

The next day I searched the *Art Index* for references to him. Except for my own articles I found none.

The one result of my inquiries was a brief syndicated story in the newspapers about my return home.

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Two weeks later I received an envelope, postmarked New York City, that contained a news clipping and the illustration from my article on Frazier. Nothing more.

The clipping, which was some years old, was an obituary of the internationally famed architect Ernst Stern. At one time I had planned doing an article on Stern and had collected everything I could find about him, looking for a lead that might suggest a different approach to the man and his work. But I found none—at least, none that I cared to use. An article in one of the news magazines gave the impression that though the old man was married—to a woman many years his junior—and the father of two lovely young daughters that—

Nothing had been spelled out, so obviously nothing could be proved, but there were references to "his handsome male secretary" and to his surrounding himself with "attractive young men." None of the other articles contained similar references. They concentrated on the old man's outstanding work.

After reading the obituary, a brief description of Stern's death by his own hand—he had put the barrel of a shotgun in his mouth and pulled the trigger—I turned to the illustration of me. Across its face someone had scrawled *Murderer!*

I was more puzzled than shocked. What did it mean, I wondered. Then it hit me. All the articles on Stern had referred to his narcissism. His office was decorated, not with illustrations of his works—as one would expect—but with paintings, photographs, and sculptures of himself. Obviously he would have been interested in having Frazier do his portrait and would have been able to afford it.

I rented a car at the airport and drove out to Frazier's studio. Again it reminded me of a fortress. And this time I recognized why. It had no windows. Once more the door was opened before I could knock, and again I had the feeling that Frazier was expecting me.

The studio room we entered was now elegantly furnished, and a fire crackled in the huge stone fireplace. Frazier gestured to a chair and I sat down.

"I see you have grown to look like my painting," he remarked.

It was a statement of fact. I would have thought there'd be an air of smugness about him, but there wasn't. He seemed

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more subdued, almost afraid.

I handed him the envelope I'd received in the mail, and he glanced at the clipping, then at the illustration. He looked up, his face devoid of expression.

"So your game *was* blackmail," I said.

He didn't deny it, and I continued, "Stern was a homosexual. You guessed it, then painted his secret for all to see."

"No," Frazier said. "Not his secret—his secrets. His masks revealed many secrets that he had concealed, not from himself, as you concealed yours, but from his family, his friends, his associates—from the world. His animal and spiritual masks looked nothing like him at any age."

"Then why didn't he just deny them?"

"I don't know. Their very ugliness seemed to fascinate him."

"Perhaps he wanted to view them in secret, remind himself of what he was. Like Dorian Gray."

"No. Once he'd paid me the sixty thousand that I asked for them, he burned them on the spot—in that fireplace. He committed suicide the next day."

I stared into the fire and saw the old man as he watched his secret life go up in flames. No matter what his crimes, I thought, he hardly deserved that.

"No," I said. "He didn't commit suicide. You murdered him."

It was a moment before Frazier answered. When he did I could barely hear his voice above the fire's crackle.

"Yes," he confessed. "I murdered him—with *your* help."

The words froze me. I felt completely numb. Then the numbness burned away, and I knew I had been used. But what bothered me was that I had known I was being used, had let myself be used. Rage flared up in me—as much at myself as at Frazier. I sprang to my feet, the beast in me suddenly gone mad, and struck out at him, and struck and struck . . .

I've always been suspicious of people who claimed they blacked out before committing some horrible crime. Perhaps afterward, I thought, but not before. Now I'm not sure. Certainly there was a moment when the beast within possessed me, directed my actions. The next thing I knew I was standing over Frazier's bloody, mangled body. I checked to see if anything could be done for him, but he was beyond human assistance.

My first reaction was to

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notify the police, but before I did, I searched for any paintings that Frazier might have hidden, so that I could destroy them. But except for some concealed behind the monk's-cloth curtain I found none. And after viewing those I decided not to turn myself in, hoping that in time my writing would serve some larger purpose and atone for my act.

The paintings that made me decide were of Frazier himself. I'll not describe all of them, only the fifth of his self-portraits, the center mask of which had deep scratches across one cheek as if from the claws of a lion. Frazier's face now bore similar scratches.

The fifth mask seen from the left was largely in red and black, with touches of blue and yellow. It seemed on fire, the flames suggesting horns, giving a Satanic cast to the features. The mask seen from the right was faceless—a mere skull-like outline with gaping holes where the eyes, nose, and mouth had been. Tears of zinc white dripped from the eyeless sockets. The features of this mask had collected in a shriveled heap at the bottom of the painting where the tears had washed them.

There were only the five paintings—no sixth or seventh.

I had the strange feeling that Frazier himself had sent me Stern's obituary, that he had scrawled *Murderer!* across the face of the illustration, knowing that they would bring me here. The postmark on the envelope meant nothing—all sorts of people advertised that they would remail letters from New York for a small fee.

But why had Frazier done it? Why had he brought me here, knowing I would kill him? *Why?* So that he could be punished? Were the masks really the result of ESP or of research and intuition? Is there such a thing as fate—or do we control our own destinies?

At times I seem to glimpse an answer. Life must retain its mystery if it is to have a meaning. To know what is coming and to be unable to change it is untenable. Not knowing makes life an adventure from day to day. We must fly ever upward toward the sun till its brightness blinds us and its fire melts the wax of our wings and we plunge earthward to our death.

But more and more, like Baudelaire as he lay dying in that all-white room in Belgium, I feel the wind from the wings of madness . . .

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a *NEW* crime story by

E. X. FERRARS

It is more than ten years since we last brought you a new story by E. X. Ferrars—surely much too long an interval! We sincerely hope the author won't wait another decade before she sends EQMM another story . . .

"Ashes to Ashes" is a fine example of the moving, perceptive crime story, full of realistic details almost tenderly observed—the kind of semidocumentary fiction that English writers do so extremely well. The kind of crime story that has a lingering mnemonic quality . . .

ASHES TO ASHES

by E. X. FERRARS

"YOU GO MAD WHENever that man's away," Mrs. Harley said in a shrill voice from the doorway. Her bent figure was robed in a crimson, quilted dressing gown, her white hair was carefully curled on rollers. Her arthritic hands grasped the two sticks without which she could not walk. "Vacuuming the carpet at nine o'clock in the evening. What's got into you? Couldn't it have waited till morning?"

Her daughter Alison switched off the vacuum cleaner and her mind emerged from the daze into which it had been lulled by the throbbing hum of the machine.

"I'm sorry," she said. She never had much to say for herself.

"Did you really think I couldn't hear it in my room?"

Mrs. Harley's room was on the ground floor. It had once been the dining room of the big old house but was now furnished with the double bed and massive wardrobe that dated back beyond the 30 years of her widowhood. The cloakroom had been turned into a bathroom for her. She never went upstairs any more.

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"I was just slipping off into a doze when you got started," Mrs. Harley said. "Now I don't suppose I'll get to sleep again tonight."

"I'm sorry," Alison repeated. "I didn't think. It's just that I get so restless when he isn't here."

Her mother gave a tight little scornful smile.

"You go mad, that's what happens," she said. "He's had the most extraordinary effect on you. One would think you didn't know what it's like to sleep one night without a man next to you, though you once stood it for long enough and didn't make any fuss about it or start doing housework in the middle of the night."

The old woman seldom missed a chance to needle her daughter for not having married until she was 39. Mrs. Harley had been a very handsome woman in her day, unlike the oddly nebulous Alison, and she despised Alison for her lack of obvious attractions and was bitterly resentful that she had finally married.

"You used to go to bed early and read, or have a bath, or wash your hair," Mrs. Harley said. "Why can't you do something like that now?"

"It's just that he said he'd telephone. I don't want to be in the bath when—"

"Then go to bed. You've an extension by your bed, haven't you? Even if you drop off to sleep it'll wake you, won't it?"

"Yes, of course, only—"

"Only you go mad when he's away, almost as if you're afraid he won't come back. And why should he, after all?"

Maneuvering her weight on her sticks, Mrs. Harley turned and moved slowly down the hall.

Alison began to wind up the cord of the vacuum cleaner. She was used to doing what her mother told her, but she did not want to go to bed. With the carpet cleaned she would have liked to go on to polish the furniture. It was solid mahogany furniture, her dead father's taste, which Alison cherished out of sentiment and habit. The dark wood repaid polishing. She could make it gleam like the surface of a still pool, reflecting moonlight.

Not that there was any need for her to do the work. The daily maid was competent enough and curiously devoted to the household. She had been coming to them for years and seemed half to enjoy the bullying she constantly got from Mrs. Harley. And in the mood that Mrs. Harley was in tonight, the old woman would probably complain that even the sound of Alison moving

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about in the room was keeping her awake. And if Alison went to the kitchen and set about quietly making the chocolate mousse which Nigel liked so much and which would only improve if it were kept in the refrigerator until tomorrow evening, when he would return home, Mrs. Harley was capable of complaining that she was being kept awake by the whirr of the egg beater.

Reluctantly Alison went upstairs.

She had been married for six months now. Ever since it had happened, at a time when her mother, naturally, had slipped into the habit of believing that the risk of her daughter marrying and leaving her was safely past, Mrs. Harley had treated Alison as if marriage had somehow been detrimental to her character, as if Alison's affection, loyalty, even her common sense were no longer to be trusted. Yet Alison had never once suggested leaving her. Nigel had simply moved in with them, and had always been patient and considerate with his sick, demanding mother-in-law.

But Mrs. Harley seemed to regard Nigel's very gentleness as proof—if proof were needed, which heaven knew, she said, it was not—that he had married Alison only for the fortune she would some day inherit from her mother. A bully herself, Mrs. Harley deeply distrusted mildness in others. And why else, except for her wealth, she kept asking, should anyone have wanted to marry Alison?

Yes, why indeed, Alison asked herself now, as she met her chronically tired eyes in the looking glass.

She had changed out of the clothes she had been wearing into a nightdress and dressing gown, and had sat down at the dressing table and started to brush her graying hair. Her eyes were a washed-out shade of blue and just now they were full of anxiety. She had never spoken of it to Nigel, but she was always helplessly anxious when he was away. She could not control it. That was what had driven her to vacuum the sitting-room carpet and made her want to polish the furniture at nine o'clock at night, and why, later on, when he had telephoned, she would take a sleeping pill. She could never get to sleep without one.

Her anxiety was not exactly that she would never see him again, as her mother had suggested. She was not aware of being excessively afraid that his car might crash and he'd be killed, or that he might meet some other woman and vanish away with her out of Alison's life. The feeling was more

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formless than that. It was as if she half believed, when he was not there to reassure her, that he did not really exist, except in her imagination.

At the time when they first met, the emptiness of her life had been so complete, her need of love so desperate, that experiencing it had caused a kind of fever in her brain, a quiet, hidden delirium. And it is possible sometimes for people to wake from delirium, to find that all the images that have possessed their minds have been delusions. When she was alone, Alison sometimes caught herself wondering if her own existence were a delusion. To doubt Nigel's was even easier.

He had left for London that morning on business. He was employed by a local firm of chartered accountants and often had to go to London. He always telephoned Alison when he went away. But that evening he did not telephone until nearly eleven o'clock. In that household that was very late. Alison had been in bed for some time, reading a travel book. She read a great many travel books although she had never traveled, and was not even sure she really wanted to.

In the same way, in the old days, she had never been sure in her heart of hearts that she wanted a job, although she had told herself and other people that it was only because of her mother's needs that she stayed so much at home. From time to time Alison had done a certain amount of voluntary civic work, and Mrs. Harley was not so helpless that she could not be left for an odd half day once or twice a week. Yet somehow Alison's enthusiasm for causes or for her fellow workers had never lasted long.

It had been a husband that she wanted. A man of her own. Nothing else. And the force of her desire had dulled the interest that she might have felt in other things. All that she had wanted was to be able to look herself in the eye, as she had been doing in the mirror earlier in the evening, and tell herself that she was really a woman. A woman as good as other women. A fact which her mother, before the miracle of Nigel, had made sure that Alison should painfully and deeply doubt.

When the telephone rang, Alison snatched it up before it had time to ring twice.

A man's voice said, "Mr. Arkell is calling you from London and wishes you to pay for the call. Do you accept the charges?"

"Yes, yes, go ahead, please," Alison answered impatiently. When Nigel telephoned from

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London he usually reversed the charges, to save himself the trouble of assembling the right change for the call, or settling up with his host, if he were staying with a friend. "Nigel?" she went on immediately, as if she were afraid the connection might be broken. "Nigel?"

"Yes, darling, how are you?"

His voice was soft, precise, full of affection. His voice had been the first thing about him, apart from his rather shy interest in her, that had attracted and charmed Alison. She had not noticed that in his small, neat, unobtrusive way he was really quite good-looking. For he was shorter than she was, and it had been one of her daydreams that the man who would love her would be tall and broad and would have to stoop down to kiss her. But by now she would not have had anything about Nigel at all different.

"I was getting worried that you weren't going to phone," she said. "It's later than usual."

"I'm sorry. I've been having a long talk with Chris, trying to talk some sense into him about this idea he's got of giving up his job. He's in a particularly difficult mood. I didn't realize how late it was." Christopher was Nigel's great problem, a younger brother of whom he was very fond, but who was as unlike him as could be, an irresponsible and, as Alison believed, rather dishonest young man, who had been married and divorced twice and who changed jobs with ever-increasing frequency. "I almost didn't phone. I was afraid you'd be asleep."

"You know I never manage to fall asleep when I'm expecting you to call," Alison said.

"I'm sorry, then."

"It doesn't matter."

"Have you taken your sleeping pill yet?"

"No, I'll take it now. But tell me, Nigel—" She did not want him to hang up yet. She wanted to go on enjoying the solace of his voice. "Did you get Chris to listen to you in the end, or is he still being stubborn?"

She had met Christopher Arkell only twice, once when he had come to their wedding and had drunk too much champagne and kissed her unpleasantly and moistly, and once when she and Nigel had gone to London together and Chris, in funds at the moment, had taken them out to an expensive lunch. Alison disliked and distrusted him. But for Nigel's sake she accepted him as a cross that had to be borne, as Nigel did her mother.

"I don't know," Nigel replied. "You know what he's

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like. After two or three drinks he loves everyone and he'll agree with everything you say, but it doesn't mean anything. Next day it's all forgotten. And I've a feeling he's been getting himself into hot water in his present job and that if he doesn't leave of his own accord he may get eased out—or something worse. Perhaps it's really best for him to quit, though what's going to happen to him if he goes on like this . . . But there's no need to worry you with his troubles at this time of night. How's your mother?" He never forgot to ask.

"The same as usual," Alison said. "About what time do you think you'll be home tomorrow?"

"Sometime late in the afternoon, I should say. I'm very tired. It's been a long day—the drive, then business all afternoon and Chris all evening. I don't expect I'll try to make a particularly early start."

"No, don't. Take care of yourself, dearest."

"You, too. And don't forget to take your sleeping pill."

"Yes, right away now. Good night."

"Good night."

Alison put the telephone down. She got out of bed, went to the bathroom, took a sleeping pill from the bottle in the medicine cabinet, swallowed the pill, and went back to bed. Calmed by her talk with Nigel, she fell asleep soon and slept dreamlessly.

She woke, as she always did, even if she had taken a sleeping pill, at 7:30. She saw that a fine rain, hardly more than a heavy mist, was falling. Through it the tall trees in the garden and the house across the street looked spectral. Getting up, she put on her dressing gown and slippers and started downstairs to the kitchen to prepare her mother's morning tea.

Normally, when Alison had done that, she would have returned upstairs, had a bath, dressed, and gone downstairs again to make breakfast. While she was making it, if Nigel were home, he would have had a bath and shaved and dressed, then appeared, in his quiet, brisk way, just after she had taken in her mother's tray. But something about this morning was not normal.

Alison became aware of it as she went down the stairs. Usually, when she went down from the room where she had slept with the window open, she had the feeling of descending into musty, used-up air. All the ground-floor windows would have been closed all night and the smoke of the many cigarettes that Nigel had

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smoked would have sunk into the carpets and chairs, leaving their staleness behind. Smoking was Nigel's one vice. He was almost a chain-smoker, and although Alison really rather liked this, feeling that it was part of the new masculine element in the house, the first thing she did every morning, even before she had put the kettle on for her mother's tea, was to open most of the windows wide. But this morning there was no staleness to greet her as she reached the hall, and this was not merely because there happened to be no cigarette smoke.

From somewhere a sharp cold draft was blowing in.

She wondered if she could have forgotten to close a window the night before. But she remembered having made her usual rounds and was sure that she had closed them all. However, an unfamiliar chill was coming in from somewhere, and her nerves responded to it, even before she had started to puzzle about it consciously, with an odd little chill of apprehension.

She looked into the sitting room. The windows there were shut as usual. She went into the kitchen and saw that the window was closed and the back door safely locked and bolted. And in the kitchen she did not feel the draft. So perhaps, she thought, the feeling of it brushing damply against her had been her imagination, another symptom of the unease she felt whenever Nigel was away.

Filling the kettle, she put it on the gas, put an embroidered cloth on her mother's tray, set out the delicate little Crown Derby tea set that her mother had used for as long as Alison could remember, brewed the tea, took it to her mother's room, and opened the door.

The tray crashed from Alison's hands. She began to scream and scream.

At first she did not know she was screaming. She only felt possessed by a shattering force that tore at her in a terrible way, brutally rending something out of her. When she realized that it was she who was screaming, that it was she who was making the horrible sounds she could now hear, she stopped and stood silent except for the wheezing of her long shuddering gulps for breath.

The fine china lay in fragments on the floor beneath her. The steaming tea was staining the carpet. She felt absurdly guilty and frightened, as if she were certain to be punished for it. At the same time she stared and stared at the bed where her mother lay.

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The odd thing was that Alison had often imagined something like this. She had often thought that one day she might come into the room and find her mother dead. Sometimes she had even wished for it. But in her mind the scene had always been peaceful and orderly, one over which it would have been decent and easy to mourn quietly, one which she could greet with sober grief. Death had always had dignity.

She had not thought of open, wildly staring eyes, or of a mouth stretched wide, as if still in the midst of a soundless shriek for help, or of blood blackened down the side of a terrified old face and over the pillow. She had not thought of a broken window with the dripping cold of the wet morning streaming into the room, and through it to the rest of the house, and of drawers pulled out and their contents thrown everywhere, as if in some special violence against the harmless stockings and gloves and scarfs and corsets.

Among them lay her mother's jewel case, broken open and empty.

That jewel case had been a very important object in Mrs. Harley's life, a source of power. Its contents could be promised to Alison, and then the promise could be withdrawn. Occasionally too, when for some reason affection had stirred in the old woman's mind, she had called Alison to her and almost as if to make up to her for something, had given her a gift out of the case, a brooch, a pendant, a bracelet, saying, "Here, you may as well have this now as later. I'll never wear it again."

They had always been little things, these gifts, almost the sort of trinkets you might give to a child. Alison had scorned them as much as she had been grateful for them. She had often thought that her mother would never wear her rubies again either, or her pearls or the diamond sunburst, and to have had these beautiful and valuable things at least to finger upstairs in privacy, even if there would never be any occasion to go out in them, would have given Alison a great deal of pleasure. Now, seeing the ravished case, all the rubies, pearls, and diamonds gone, Alison was startled by the stab of vengeful satisfaction that she felt.

Just for an instant she seemed to feel a shameful sort of delight that her mother had lost her life for the sake of the jewels she had hoarded, and which were no financial loss to Alison now, since of course they were fully insured. Yet only a moment later she could

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not believe she had ever had such a feeling. She was a good daughter. She always had been. And what a good daughter felt now was only pity and grief. And it was her duty to summon the police as quickly as possible.

Walking backward, as if leaving the presence of royalty, Alison withdrew from the room, her gaze held hypnotized by the dead face on the bed. But all of a sudden she turned and ran, feeling that she might start screaming again if she did not get out of sight of the staring, empty eyes. She plunged into the sitting room and threw herself, shuddering, in the chair beside the table on which the telephone stood.

You dialed 999 on occasions like this, didn't you?

Her hand went out to the telephone. Then it dropped slowly down on her lap and lay there, first twitching, then motionless.

She had just seen something which she did not understand. Something which puzzled her very much indeed. Because her mind seldom worked quickly, and was even slower than usual at the moment, numb and confused as it was by shock, she did not know why this thing seemed so important. It was something she had often seen before, if not always in that place. She had got used to seeing it and to not making a fuss about it, even though it slightly offended her.

It was just a little heap of cigarette ashes on the carpet beside the chair in which she was sitting.

For all the neatness of his habits, Nigel, the chain-smoker, was always forgetting to knock the ashes off his cigarette into an ashtray. Alison had often sat uneasily watching as the ashes grew long and feathery and finally dropped onto his jacket, or the arm of his chair, or the floor. And there was one of those little heaps now.

But last night she had run the vacuum cleaner over that spot. She knew she had. She remembered pulling the chair out to clean under it as well as all round it and there had been no ashes there when she had finished. There should be none now.

Her shuddering stopped as she began to think about what this meant.

The odd thing was that she found herself thinking with unusual lucidity. Her thoughts seemed to be forming in a hard white light. There was no vagueness about them for once. They were linked together by simple logic.

Nigel, she thought, had sat here in this chair last night *after*

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she had finished cleaning the carpet. That was obvious. He had sat *here* to telephone. He had talked to her on the telephone. Yet he could not have rung her up from here. He could not by any means have called the extension upstairs from here. So it must have been Christopher who had telephoned from London and asked the exchange for a reversed-charges call.

But Nigel had been waiting here in this room, waiting for the call to come through. His car had been in the garden, invisible from the road and the house among the shrubs and tall trees. And as soon as the bell had rung, he had snatched up the telephone, just as she had done upstairs, and so had been able to speak to her, while Christopher, in London, had listened in silence.

And while Nigel had been waiting here, he had smoked as usual, the ashes from his cigarette growing long and dribbling onto the floor, probably without his being aware of it. But even if he had noticed, it would not have worried him, for he could not have known that the last thing Alison had done before going up to bed was to vacuum the carpet.

The call had purposely been made late so that he could be sure she would be in bed when it came through. He had spoken as tenderly as usual and had reminded her to take her sleeping pill. Then he had probably listened to her going to the bathroom to take the pill and had heard her return to the bedroom. He would have waited a while to give the pill time to act and then he set about cold-bloodedly murdering her mother.

The broken window and the rifled jewel case had of course been blinds, to make the crime look like a case of simple robbery. The truth was that the jewels were a mere drop in the ocean of what Nigel had been after, had been after ever since he first met Alison and heard that she was rich old Mrs. Harley's only relative. As so often, Mrs. Harley had been cruelly right.

And hadn't Alison really known it all along?

What she did not know was that she had become quite rigid in her chair. She looked as if she were in a trance. Her mind, with its cool logic, seemed to be at work outside her body. More than she had ever felt it before, it seemed to her that she did not actually exist, that she was not really here in this familiar sitting room. That she was only an illusion, a lost spirit, wandering in the wastes of a ghastly dreamland.

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And Nigel, of course, had never existed either. The gentle and loving man to whom she had given her timorous heart had been her own invention. He had never been real. It had not been merely when he was out of her sight that he had no identity; he had never, never, had identity.

The minutes passed. Alison had almost forgotten her mother and what had happened to her. But at last she gave a little sigh and relaxed. She pushed her hair back from her face. Her forehead was moist and her fingers were very cold.

She looked thoughtfully at the little heap of ashes on the carpet. Such a little heap. A policeman's shoe could easily flatten it. It could disappear, and then how could anyone know that Nigel had not been in London with Christopher, had not been telephoning from the London flat? There would be the record of a reversed-charges call, made from that flat. It would be Alison's word against those of the Arkell brothers. And a wife—hadn't she heard that somewhere?—was not permitted to give evidence against her husband.

But what was there to stop her from manufacturing a little more evidence?

Reaching out to the box of cigarettes on the table, Alison took a cigarette, put it tentatively between her lips, lit it with the heavy silver table-lighter, and drew smoke into her lungs. She coughed, then choked helplessly. The room swam. She had smoked only once before in her life. It had been years ago, when she had been a young woman at a dance and her partner had persuaded her to try a cigarette. Anxious to please, she had smoked it from beginning to end. But deciding that she did not like it, she had never smoked again. Now she smoked on steadily. She looked as dedicated to the act of smoking as she ever had been to anything.

When the ashes grew long, she let them fall close to the ashes already on the carpet. She let some more grow, and let them fall. Presently, when the cigarette was more than half smoked, she decided that there were enough ashes there to make it impossible for anyone to overlook them. It would be a mistake to overdo things. She would describe to the police, of course, how she had thoroughly vacuumed the carpet before going to bed and how she could not possibly have missed all those ashes. How did she think they had got there? How indeed? But now it was time to stop and to destroy what was

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left of the cigarette.

She took it to her mother's ground-floor bathroom and flushed it down the drain.

She was quite cool. In a curious way she had enjoyed smoking the cigarette. It was wonderful, really, how much she had enjoyed it.

Returning to the sitting room she picked up the telephone and dialed 999.

"Police . . . Please, can you come at once? A terrible thing has happened."

Sometime, she thought, when all the inevitable fuss was over, when she was avenged and free, she might take up smoking . . .

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a *NEW* detective story by

LAWRENCE TREAT

Meet Chief of Police Andrew Burma, the entire police force of a seashore community. Small-town sleuth Andy certainly had his own modus operandi for the solving of crime. How otherwise could Fair Harbor, and its summer-resident area known as Red Spit, be able to boast the lowest crime rate per capita in America? But now, for the first time in his crimebusting career, Andy was faced with a homicide . . .

CRIME AT RED SPIT

by LAWRENCE TREAT

CHIEF OF POLICE Andrew Burma was not precisely experienced in the investigation of homicides. At $4000 a year, which was his official salary, the town of Fair Harbor could hardly expect otherwise.

He agreed. In fact, at the annual town meeting which took place on a certain ugly winter evening, when none of the summer residents could possibly attend, somebody proposed giving him an increase. Andy, equal to all crises, rose awkwardly and ambled to the front of the room.

He was wearing his uniform. His hair was a little shaggy because Val, his wife, had been angry with him the last time she'd cut his hair and she'd taken it out on him. He looked gawky and embarrassed, which he wasn't, and friendly and sort of hopeful, which he was.

He gulped visibly before he spoke. "Shucks," he said. "I ain't worth even what I'm getting, and I wouldn't think of taking more." And, amid tumultuous applause, he went back to his seat next to Val.

He had a sound reason for his demurral—namely the Pension Fund. He figured that his statement was worth an editorial in the weekly *Chronicle*, and between that and general community sympathy the Pension Fund would pull in

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perhaps $1000, as against a raise of $200 or $300 that he might have been given otherwise. And his reasoning was, in fact, justified by events.

Let it be clear, however, that Andy was not a corrupt policeman and did not actually insist on cash contributions to the Pension Fund. But he let it be known to the summer people that a gift in cash, usually around Christmas, was always acceptable. As for the year-round residents, he was satisfied with a friendly smile and don't break the law, please; or at least not when Andy was around.

Although Andy had never gone to college he was a master of statistics. The knack came naturally, like left-handedness or 20-20 vision, and he used his talent for the common good. The result was that Fair Harbor had the lowest crime rate per capita in America. It seemed a downright shame now to spoil that record with a homicide.

Mrs. Willie Hemsley would have agreed. In life she had always been cooperative. She'd been blonde as a lemon, soft as a ball of cotton, and a general nuisance to the community, because she was not only a dipsomaniac, but also a wanderer. When she was in her cups, which was frequently, she staggered home along the narrow sandy road that led to her beachhouse. But often enough she couldn't make it and she blundered into other people's houses, climbed into their parked cars, or else flopped down in their cabanas. When she passed out in public places, it was Andy's job to bring her home.

He could, of course, have locked her up for the night, but Val was an inveterate collector of antiques and bric-a-brac that she found in the town dump, and she housed her treasures in the town jail. And while Mrs. Willie would have been glad to sleep it off in the gentle ambience of broken-down furniture, Andy had too much respect for her. Mrs. Willie belonged in her own home, and Andy brought her there. He did so gently, with deference, and the next morning he always came around to inquire after her health. She would thank him graciously and make her contribution to the Pension Fund willingly and without fuss. In marked contrast, for instance, to another summer resident, Titus Van Warner, who never parted with so much as a cent.

In the course of Andy's visits to Mrs. Willie's house he came to know a great deal about her, without having been told anything directly. He was aware

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that she had led a tragic life and had good reasons for having turned to drink. Her marriage had been unfortunate, and she'd either been childless or had lost an only child. In her loneliness before her divorce she had lavished all her affection on a black and white setter, now deceased. It had kept her and her husband together for an extra year, and the dog's picture, framed in silver, stood on Mrs. Willie's bureau.

Her house, although small, was neat and attractive. It was built on a sandy spit of land that narrowed the entrance to the inlet which gave Fair Harbor its name. It was choice land, with a quiet bay on one side and the more robust sea on the other. Because of the reddish tint of the sand the area was known as Red Spit. It contained a dozen houses, and although you could reach them by road, which was merely a pair of sandy ruts slicing through the tall beach grass, most of the Red Spitters maintained communication with Fair Harbor by boat, on the bay side. They were a clannish group, and practically all had attended the party that the Maxfields gave on the night of Mrs. Willie's death.

Andy got the news the morning after. Johnny Driver, who'd come out to the Maxfields to see what he could do about their ailing refrigerator, found Mrs. Willie's body in the high grass just a few feet off the road. He went back to town and told Andy.

Andy had been about to make a trip to the dump. Val had had news of a brass music stand that she coveted, and a couple of days ago she'd asked Andy to get it for her. He had delayed until this morning. A homicide investigation, however, superseded Val's needs, so Andy picked up Dr. Morton, the county coroner, and the two of them drove out to Red Spit to look. To prevent the car from destroying any possible evidence, Andy parked a short distance away from the body. He studied the surrounding terrain while Dr. Morton got down on his knees and made his medical examination.

After a due pause Dr. Morton stated the obvious. "She's dead," he said. "Looks like she got a crack on the head."

"When?"

"Last night."

"Not wearing much in the way of clothes," Andy remarked.

Dr. Morton pulled down the short terrycloth robe which was the dead woman's only garment. "Poor Mrs. Willie," he

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said. With which sentimental observation he bowed out of the case. Except, of course, for the autopsy, which added nothing to the general sum of knowledge.

Andy stared at the body and noted details. The body was lying in the high grass, about eight feet from the road. The grass between the body and the road was disturbed, as if the body had been dragged through the grass some time ago. Still, you could easily drive by and not notice anything out of the ordinary. For the rest, the shifting ruts and the sandy terrain in which the grass grew preserved no marks. Footprints, tire impressions—they might as well have been made on the surface of a body of water. Nor was there any trace of the weapon that had crushed in her skull.

Andy took Dr. Morton back to town. There he called the State Police. He told them what had happened and asked for expert assistance. Then he drove back to Red Spit, left his car blocking the road, and walked to the beach cottages. He spoke to the various householders on Red Spit, but before speaking to them he managed to examine their cars.

He found no dents, no broken headlights, no evidence that any vehicle had run over Mrs. Willie. Which saddened Andy considerably, for he'd hoped to prove that she'd been hit accidentally, and that somehow or other the driver who'd done it was unaware of what had happened. As he and Val decided that evening, a verdict of accidental death would have done wonders for the Fair Harbor crime statistics.

Failing evidence of vehicular homicide on the part of any of the Red Spitters, it followed that either one of them had bludgeoned Mrs. Willie to death or that a stranger had been on the spit and was responsible for the murder.

Andy asked his questions judiciously, without giving out any information. Nobody on the spit seemed aware of the reason for his curiosity, nor did Andy reveal it. Nevertheless he managed to get definite answers. The upshot was he learned that all the Red Spitters had attended the Maxfield party, that there had been no outsiders, that nobody had seen Mrs. Willie since yesterday morning, that no strangers had been observed in Fair Harbor, and that nobody had driven to town yesterday with the sole exception of Titus Van Warner, who volunteered the information. And Andy told himself he would have found that out anyhow.

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Titus was a retired musician. A few years ago the orchestra in which he'd been playing had merged with a larger and more important one, and Titus was one of the casualties. He was tall, long-nosed, and sad, and he spoke wearily, as if every word had to be pinched out with effort. But if he found it difficult to speak, his violin had an easier voice, and night after night the strains of his music wafted over the sands and lulled the Red Spitters to sleep.

He owned two cars. His big red convertible stood in front of his house all summer long, as if to advertise his status. But when he drove to town he took his beach buggy, which he kept parked in a gully behind the garage.

Before speaking to Titus, Andy studied the beach buggy carefully. It had no dents. With his thumb Andy pushed at the metal of the body. Frowning, he then stepped back and administered a solid kick to the right-hand fender. The resulting dent satisfied him.

He walked back, past the garage. The garage door was partly open and he gazed inside. There, as if defying him to take it, stood the brass music stand that Val had asked for. Behind it was the wrought-iron chair that she'd told him to pick up from the dump a couple of weeks ago, but which had vanished by the time he got there. Leaning against the chair was the marble table top that Val had also craved, and which also had disappeared before Andy could capture it. Still, it was fair game, and if Titus chose to engage in the same pursuits as Val he had a perfect right to. But why store all his treasures in the garage, instead of using them?

Wondering vaguely what pleasure Titus got from this stock-piling, Andy circled the garage and approached the house. He knocked authoritatively on the front door.

Titus opened it and stepped outside before he spoke, as if he had good reason for keeping Andy outdoors. Andy backed up.

Titus was wearing red shorts over his long bony shanks, and his blue knit shirt hung loosely across his chest. He answered Andy's questions slowly and with courtesy. Yes, he'd driven to town yesterday. He'd been to a cocktail party at the other end of the village and he'd come home some time after six. Yes, he'd come and gone in his beach buggy. Yes, he'd had a few drinks, and later on he'd gone to the Maxfield party. No, he hadn't seen Mrs. Willie yesterday, nor had he noticed a light in her house.

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Andy frowned. "Mr. Van Warner," he said, lowering his voice. "I'd like to warn you that the State Police will be here in a little while. They'll have a lot of questions to ask, and they'll want to look at your car. Take my advice and don't show them that beach buggy of yours."

"That's extraordinarily kind of you," Titus said. He spoke even more slowly than usual and he repeated the last word, as if he was astonished he'd been able to come out with all those syllables. "Extra-ordinarily," he said again. "Still—why would they want to see it?"

"You'll find out, and you'll be mighty glad I warned you."

"Indeed, sir," Titus said, "I thank you. If, perhaps, I can repay the favor—"

Andy pointed out not only that Titus could, but how it could be done. "Just send it along to the Pension Fund," Andy said. "Care of me."

"Perhaps," Titus said, "it would be simpler to give it to you now." And he handed Andy a $10 bill.

Andy accepted it. On the surface politely, but within himself resentfully. He figured he was doing Titus a $100 favor, considering the telltale dent now in the beach buggy.

Naturally Andy gave no indication of his thought processes. He merely thanked Titus, blinked in the sun, and turned around to trudge back to his car. He was sitting in it and gazing meditatively at the bay when Corporal Finnegan of the State Police arrived with an assistant.

The corporal, trim and neat from his polished boots to his well-combed hair, was as expert as they come, and what he couldn't do, his partner could. They photographed the body from all angles, took snapshots of every blade of grass, and devoted a roll of film to the road and its surroundings. They examined the grass minutely and snipped off a few samples on which they believed they could detect flecks of blood. They made plaster casts and moulage casts where Andy had seen nothing to make casts of. They got down on their hands and knees and searched for tire marks and possible traces of a weapon. Their search was exhaustive and efficient. At the end of it Finnegan stated his conclusions.

"She was hit with something. We'll take pictures of the wound and of her clothing at oblique angles and under infra-red, and something may turn up. But so far I've never seen a homicide that was so lacking in clues, and I'd hate to guess whether she was struck by

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a car or by some kind of weapon."

Andy nodded. He'd said the same thing, but more pithily, to Doc Morton a couple of hours ago. Andy's precise words were: "Can't tell a thing. Car? Mebbe."

"The people in the houses out there," Finnegan said, pointing to the ones on Red Spit. "I'd like to look at their cars. If she was hit by one it's bound to show."

"I looked," Andy said. "Found nothing."

"Mind if we examine them, too?" Finnegan said. "After all, six eyes are better than two."

"I'd be grateful for the help," Andy said modestly.

He kept in the background while Finnegan questioned the Red Spitters, one at a time. He explained that there had been a homicide and that he needed their cooperation. He examined the various cars, but he missed out on Van Warner's beach buggy, which was hidden behind the garage.

Finnegan concentrated on the Maxfields. Shirley Maxfield, neatly packaged in a bikini, apparently thought she could handle all men with a winning smile and a flirtatious glance. She explained that her husband had gone fishing.

"But anything you'd like to know," she said breathlessly, as if she were swooning at the very sight of Finnegan, "I'll tell you. I'll do just *everything* I can."

Her account was somewhat garbled, but it seemed that the Maxfield refrigerator had broken down yesterday afternoon just before the party, and Shirley had called Rudy Driver to come out and fix it. He arrived around seven, examined the refrigerator, and advised the Maxfields to buy a new one. Shirley must have smiled her best and coaxed Rudy into promising to come out with a couple of blocks of ice. If he couldn't make it, she asked him to send somebody else, and he did. Charlie Yates brought the ice out in his taxi, around eight.

Andy noted that Shirley failed to mention Titus's trip, although she must have seen or heard his car. Red Spit loyalty, Andy told himself. They were a closed society out here, and Andy wondered if anyone else had driven back from town. Still, as long as the Red Spitters remembered him—rather, the Pension Fund—at Christmas, he wasn't going to make trouble for them.

After Finnegan had finished his questions he went over the information with Andy.

"We'll check up on the physical evidence," Finnegan said. "Want me to help you with anything else?"

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Andy shook his head. "I can handle the rest of it. It looks like Charlie Yates and Rudy Driver were the only outsiders who came out along that road. It's in plain sight of most of the houses, and the people here notice every car. Unless somebody hit her over the head, it seems to be either Charlie or Rudy. And Mrs. Willie didn't have any enemies. Everybody loved her, except when she was blotto, and then—well, at most she was kind of a nuisance."

"This taxi driver and the refrigerator man," Finnegan said. "I'd like to see their cars."

Rudy Driver's truck and Charlie Yates's taxi had all the bangs, dents, and minor damage that you could ask for, but Finnegan, after a detailed examination, decided that none of the surface marks could have resulted from a collision the day before with Mrs. Willie.

Andy asked one more question than Finnegan did, and he asked it of Charlie Yates. "How did you bring the ice out?" Andy said.

Charlie answered promptly. "Tied it to the front bumper," he said. "Didn't want it melting all over the floor, and those cakes of ice were too big for buckets."

Andy's next chore was to trace Mrs. Willie's actions on the previous day, and they proved easy to follow. In the morning she'd walked from Red Spit to the main road, where she'd got a hitch from Artie Hallock. He'd dropped her off at the bank. There she'd changed a pair of $100 bills into tens, which she did regularly every two weeks. Apparently Mrs. Willie got her alimony in cash—if it was alimony.

She'd had lunch with old Mrs. Keyes and then gone to The Sand Bar. She'd spent most of the afternoon drinking there, and her bill was $7. When she left she was blotto, but she could still stay on her feet.

"I've seen her like that dozens of times," the bartender said. "She wouldn't remember nothing the next day, but she could walk straight and she could take care of herself."

"Well, this time she didn't," Andy said.

Mrs. Willie had left The Sand Bar some time before six, and her trail ended at the door. Nobody had noticed her in the village. Nobody on Red Spit had seen her come back.

Andy told Val about it that evening. "It's just one of those things," he said. "One day you walk through town and there's twenty people see you, and the next day you go down the same street at the same time and nobody's looking your way."

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Val crinkled her nose disdainfully. "Maybe she was killed somewhere else," she said, "and then her body was brought out to the spit."

"And somebody undressed her and put her in that terrycloth robe?" Andy said.

Val didn't like the way Andy said it. "Don't sound so superior," she said. "You spent the whole day investigating, you didn't even have time to get my music stand, and you haven't got the slightest idea what happened."

Andy laughed. "What makes you say that?"

"Well, have you?"

"The music stand's in a safe place and I can get it any time I want. And I know exactly how Mrs. Willie was killed and who did it. My problem is how to prove it."

"Andy," Val said humbly, "tell me how it happened."

"Only one possible way," he said. "No clues and no weapon, because the weapon was destroyed. In fact, it melted away." He paused to let his conclusion sink in.

"Charlie Yates," Andy continued, "drove out with a couple of blocks of ice tied onto his front bumper. He went out around half-past seven. The sun was in his eyes and he probably didn't even see Mrs. Willie. Anyhow, he hit her with those hundred-pound blocks of ice. When he realized she was dead he panicked. He pushed her body back in the grass where it wouldn't be seen from the road, and then he went ahead and delivered the ice to Mrs. Maxfield."

"How," Val asked, "did Mrs. Willie get back to her house in the first place?"

"Walked. Got there long before Charlie brought out the ice. Decided to take a swim to sober up, before going to that party. Put on her robe and was on her way to the beach. Maybe she stumbled, maybe her balance wasn't too good. Or maybe she was sitting there in the middle of the road—I've found her like that plenty of times, and like I said, Charlie hit her."

Val gazed at her husband with admiration. Toward such moments, Andy reflected, you point your whole existence.

"What a lovely theory!" Val exclaimed. "Do you think Charlie will break down and admit everything when he sees how clever you are?"

"I don't want him to break down and confess," Andy said. "It was an accident. I don't want to accuse him and maybe send him to jail, but I have to."

Val's look softened into a kind of awe.

In the morning Andy went

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out to Red Spit. He figured he'd locate the money that was left over from what Mrs. Willie had changed at the bank. He'd leave $93 in her purse, and the remaining $100 would make a nice round sum for the Pension Fund. Then he'd drop in on Titus and ask him for the music stand. After that Andy would have it out with Charlie Yates.

Andy had been in Mrs. Willie's house often enough, and as he opened the door he half expected to see her come toward him and say in her soft throaty voice, "Andy, I want to thank you for bringing me home last night." Then she'd go to her purse, and if she found it empty she'd open her closet door, remove the third plank on the left, and take out a small jewelry box.

"My fortune," she'd say, removing some bills from it. "And you're the only person who knows where it is. Because I can trust the police, can't I?"

But this morning there was no Mrs. Willie. Thoughtfully Andy walked over to the bureau and picked up the picture of the black and white setter. The name, Bonnie, penciled in one corner, told him nothing. He pulled open the drawers and rummaged through them. No pictures, no letters, nothing except her personal and yet almost anonymous possessions. It was as if she'd cut herself off from everything that had ever happened to her before she had come here to Red Spit.

Then, when Andy had finished his fruitless search, he opened the closet door and pulled back the plank. The jewelry box inside contained nineteen of the bills—$10 each—she'd got from the bank yesterday.

Andy replaced the money. Time enough, he thought. If anyone knew of the hiding place, if questions were raised as to what had happened to the rest of the $200 she'd had yesterday, he wanted to be in the clear. The $190 was, so to speak, a pledge to the Pension Fund.

The Pension Fund reminded him of Titus. Now that Titus knew he could have been accused of homicide, Andy might hint at a further contribution. Besides, Andy wanted the music stand. So he walked over to Titus's house and rapped confidently on the door. There was no answer, and Andy walked in.

The first thing that struck him was the shabbiness of the place, and the next thing was the picture on the wall. It was a photograph of a black and white setter. Scribbled in the corner was the name, Bonnie.

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Andy stood there, stunned. Titus and Mrs. Willie—married and divorced, and both coming to this same small community? And the photograph of Bonnie, the animal they'd both loved? It figured and everything became clear. The ex-husband living next door was paying alimony in cash. Sure, perfectly natural. And the strain of living so near him had been too much for Mrs. Willie, so she'd turned more and more to alcohol. As for Titus, almost broke, desperate, out of a job and nearly out of money, he'd decided that the only way he could rid himself of those crippling payments was to get rid of Mrs. Willie.

He'd planned it carefully and played a waiting game. He knew that Mrs. Willie staggered home blind drunk several times a week. So, day after day, he stopped off at the dump and picked up something heavy to tie onto his front bumper. A table top of marble, a wrought-iron chair, a brass music stand. Eventually he counted on finding her sitting in the road where he could run her over. His car would have no dents, nobody would guess he was involved. And last night his chance had come.

Andy was sitting inside the house, rocking slowly in a broken-down armchair, when Titus came in. The musician stopped in embarrassment.

"I hope," he said slowly, "that this visit is not official."

Andy disregarded the implied question. "I was wondering," he said, "how come you have that picture of the dog, Bonnie."

"A gift from Willie," Titus said. "We both were dog lovers, and we both had known better days before coming here. She gave me the photograph as a souvenir of our common tragedies. We both had lost a great deal."

"Together?" Andy said.

Titus stroked his bony cheek. "The import of your observation eludes me."

"Never mind," Andy said. "Do you know how Mrs. Willie was killed?"

Titus didn't answer.

"I'll tell you how," Andy said. "She was run down by your beach buggy. She was hit by that brass music stand tied onto the front bumper. Am I right?"

"Perhaps," Titus said, "it was an accident."

"I wish it had been, but Mrs. Willie was run down deliberately, and then her body was dragged over to the side of the road and hidden there. The music stand will have marks on it to show the contact, and the police lab will have no trouble

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proving it. As for the motive—marriage certificates and divorce decrees are matters of public record. She was killed to put an end to your alimony payments—and that's my case, Mr. Van Warner."

"Doubtless," Titus said, "but why tell me? Simply because Shirley Maxfield borrowed my car all those times and stored her things from the dump in my garage, and because her husband had once been married to Willie and was paying more alimony than the Maxfields could afford—how does all that concern me?"

Andy gaped. As was remarked in the beginning, he was not precisely experienced in the investigation of homicide. Still, he was grateful for help when it came, and it was not in his nature to force contributions from those who could ill afford them. Therefore he felt in his pocket. He had three crumpled bills of his own, and Titus's $10 bill from yesterday. It was sheer luck that Andy came out with the right one.

"Here's your ten dollars back," he said. "It seems that I made a mistake." And he headed for the Maxfield house to make his arrest.

Nevertheless, even after Mrs. Maxfield's arrest and confession, Andy's feelings were mixed. On the one hand he felt that he'd somehow let Val down by not getting the music stand before it was corrupted into becoming a murder weapon. But on the other hand he'd solved a homicide and the town would almost certainly offer to raise his salary. And this time, he reflected, he'd accept.

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a NEW crime story by

EDWARD D. HOCH

Joyce's past was nothing for her to be happy about—a painful childhood, a lonely and frustrated womanhood. Her future? Bleak and empty. No boy friend, no hope of marriage, no possibility of excitement, pleasure, or glamor. Then she noticed "The Man with the Eyebrows"—and Joyce's future opened up like a flower . . .

THE WAY OUT

by EDWARD D. HOCH

JOYCE IRELAND FIRST noticed the man in the elevator on a rainy Tuesday in October. Perhaps she noticed him because they were the only two without raincoats. She didn't need one for her daily trip to the bank on the first floor, and seeing him coatless she guessed he too must be on business inside the building.

He was a tall man, not handsome, with black bushy eyebrows that one noticed before anything else. Joyce came, in fact, to think of him as "The Man with the Eyebrows" when she saw him again on the same elevator two days later. She would have guessed his age at about 35, though he could have been older, and she noticed at once that he wore no wedding ring. At 28, Joyce Ireland was a girl who noticed things like that.

She had lived alone in a little downtown apartment since the death of her mother the year before. It was a lonely sort of existence, which made her long for the far-away places she'd never be able to see on the $87.50 a week take-home-pay she received from Worldwide Finance Company. In October, with another winter on the way, she had the distinct feeling that life was passing her by. Perhaps it was her looks that were against her. She'd never been pretty, and with the coming of the miniskirt even her unattractive knees were

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now revealed to the world.

That was why she began to notice the man with the bushy eyebrows. When he got into the elevator behind her for the third time in a week, she had the wild thought that he was trying to pick her up—a shy lover who had seen her on the street and followed her to the office. Now he would present himself for her approval, and she would get away from Worldwide Finance forever.

That was her first thought. The second one was that he was going to rob her.

Joyce made the trip from Worldwide to the ground-floor bank every afternoon at the same time—just a few minutes before the 3:00 bank closing. She always carried a large brown envelope filled with the checks and cash they'd taken in since the previous afternoon. Because of the nature of its business most payments to Worldwide Finance were in cash—very few Worldwide customers had checking accounts. The afternoon trip to the bank was a ritual dating from the days when a girl might carry a few hundred dollars down in the elevator with her. Now, with business increasing steadily, Joyce sometimes had as much as $5000 in the bulky envelope, especially late in the week when their customers came in faithfully with their pay envelopes.

This day, a Friday, she'd made up the deposit herself, and she knew she carried $4355 in cash and a number of checks. She clutched the envelope a little tighter to her bosom, but of course the man with the bushy eyebrows did nothing. There were three other men in the elevator, and they rode all the way down. Perhaps, she decided, the man was waiting for a day when he was alone with her, to grab the money and run.

Though nothing happened on Friday she thought about the man all week-end, and she decided finally that he *was* a thief. There was no doubt about it in her mind. At one point, on Saturday night, she was in the act of phoning her boss, Mr. Melrose, to tell him, but then she hung up. He would think she was foolish, or else question why she hadn't told him sooner. Mr. Melrose was like that.

Besides, what did she owe the company? Not much for a measly $87.50 a week. Not when she was secretary and part-time bookkeeper and hadn't had a raise in three years. She was thinking about that last part when the idea came to her—slowly at first, in bits and pieces like a jigsaw puzzle.

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Suppose, just suppose, there was a robbery and the bandit got away with the money.

But suppose, she went on in her mind, the bandit lost the money, too. Suppose she—Joyce Ireland—ended up with the four or five thousand dollars. Who would be the loser? Not Worldwide Finance—they were insured against robbery. Certainly not the bandit, who didn't deserve the money in the first place. It would be hers, all hers, like finding it in the street, like inheriting it from a rich uncle she'd never known.

With all that money she could travel to Florida or California, buy a new car, a whole new wardrobe of dresses that would make men notice her at last. She could leave the dingy apartment where she was wasting her life away—leave and be free.

On Sunday night, as the last piece of her plan clicked into place, Joyce Ireland decided to steal the bank deposit.

The man with the bushy eyebrows did not appear on Monday or Tuesday, and for a time she began to think it had been all her imagination, that he never had planned to rob her in the elevator. She became nervous and irritable at work as she waited for "The Man with the Eyebrows" to reappear, and one day even Mr. Melrose was moved to comment on her mood.

"What's the matter, Joyce?" he asked after one of her outbursts. "Have a fight with your boy friend?"

She wanted to tell him that his remark showed how little he knew or cared about her private life, but she held her tongue. "I just have a little headache," she answered finally. "It's nothing."

Mr. Melrose was big and jolly and red-faced, and most customers seemed to like him. Sometimes they still liked him even after he'd sent collectors to their homes or started garnisheeing their salaries.

"Take the rest of the afternoon off if you'd like," he suggested with rare benevolence. "Tuesday's always pretty slow."

"Thanks, but I'll be all right."

Nothing happened on Wednesday either, and she took to watching for the bushy-eyebrowed man on her lunch hour, hoping to see him somewhere on the street. But he did not reappear. By Thursday she was about to abandon the careful preparations she'd been making each day and forget the whole thing.

But Thursday was the 15th of October, and she knew the

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1st and 15th brought even more payments than the usual payday. By noon there were people lined up with their payment books and their money, and by 2:30 Mr. Melrose was out of his office asking the other girl, "How much cash have we taken in so far today, Sue?"

The girl, a dumb brunette whom Joyce despised, looked at the column and replied, "Just $5275, Mr. Melrose."

He nodded. "Joyce, you'd better go down with it now. I get nervous with that much cash in the office."

She nodded and picked up the big handbag she'd bought only a few days earlier. Then she waited while the brunette stuffed the money and checks and deposit slips into the familiar brown envelope. "Here you are," Sue said finally, handing it over.

Joyce took the envelope and her bag and left the office, walking down the hall to the elevator as she had so many times before. As she stood alone waiting for the elevator to reach her floor, she'd half forgotten about the man with the bushy eyebrows. It wasn't until she stepped into the car that he suddenly appeared and hurried in behind her. She felt her heart begin to thump with excitement.

There was only one other passenger in the elevator, an elderly woman who would be no protection at all. If he was ever going to do it this would be the day. She clutched the fat brown envelope closer.

The elevator made no other stops as it dropped steadily toward the ground floor. Just the three of them, silent passengers in a sealed world. Joyce waited.

The man shifted his feet a little and cleared his throat. The elderly woman simply waited. The elevator bumped to a stop on the ground floor and the doors slid open. There was the busy lobby, the bank—and nothing had happened.

The man smiled and allowed the elderly woman to step out. Joyce started to follow, and then he clipped her on the jaw with his fist.

It happened so fast she had no time to think. She fell sprawling out of the elevator as he snatched the brown envelope from her suddenly limp hands. Then he was running, and the elderly woman was screaming, and hands were grasping at Joyce.

"You all right, lady?"

She tried to talk, to wipe the blur from her eyes, and she couldn't. For a moment she thought her jaw was broken, but then words came. "Money—he took the money—"

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"Don't worry, lady. They'll get him."

She put a hand to her jaw, feeling for the first time the beginning of a dull throbbing pain. Her next thought was for her handbag, and she clutched it to her. "It was the bank deposit," she managed to say as two men helped her to her feet. "He got away with it all."

A policeman came into the lobby, apparently summoned from traffic duty. "You all right—not hurt?"

"He—he hit me on the jaw, but I don't think it's broken."

"The guy got away, but there's an alarm out for him. What did he look like?"

"Tall, bushy eyebrows, black hair. About thirty-five."

"Ever see him before?"

"I—" She hesitated only an instant. "No, not that I remember."

He was writing it all down. "Okay, lady. Now how much money did he get?"

"Over five thousand. I forget the exact amount."

"We'd better go up to your office," he said, taking her arm.

Upstairs, Mr. Melrose went into a state of panic. He barely asked how Joyce was feeling before he started pacing the office floor and wringing his hands. "What will they say in New York?" he mumbled. Worldwide Finance's home office was located there. "They'll think I don't know how to manage this place. They'll ask why I trusted so much money to an office girl."

"There was nothing I could do, Mr. Melrose! He took me so by surprise." Her jaw was beginning to swell now, and she resented his attitude. It only justified in her mind what she had done.

The policeman took down the exact amount of the loss and went away. The brunette followed Joyce into the rest room and tried to soothe her, applying a cold towel to her swollen jaw. Finally, when she was alone, Joyce stole a glance into her large handbag. The original brown envelope with its $5275 deposit nestled safely in the bottom, hidden beneath cigarettes and Kleenex and a key case.

She smiled as she imagined the robber's face when he opened the envelope he had taken and found all those neatly cut pieces of newspaper.

Joyce spent the evening in her apartment, nursing her throbbing jaw with cold compresses. She'd counted the money as soon as she arrived home, and now she had it safely hidden inside a sealed plastic pouch in the bathroom toilet tank. It would be best, she

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knew, to keep it hidden for a time before spending any of it. No need to flaunt it immediately and attract suspicion. She knew there was always the possibility the robber would be caught and tell the police about the cut-up newspapers, but then it would still be only his word against hers. She was certain no one in the office had seen her make the switch in envelopes as she stepped into the hall. After all, she'd been practising it every day that week without being detected.

The robbery rated a brief mention on the local news broadcast that evening, and the following day there was a half-column story buried on a back page of the paper. Loan offices and finance companies were being held up nearly every week, and there were no unusual angles to this one, not from the paper's point of view. Joyce sighed over her coffee and decided to call in sick. It was a Friday and she felt like having the week-end to herself. Her jaw still ached, and Mr. Melrose expressed no surprise when she told him she'd be staying home till Monday.

"Take care of yourself," he managed to say. "You're more important than the money."

She snorted as she hung up. He must have almost choked on that line!

She spent the rest of the day relaxing and treating her jaw, which seemed a bit better in the afternoon. The swelling had gone down, and a couple of aspirins relieved the ache. She was even thinking about going out to a movie or phoning a girl friend when the doorbell rang.

"Yes?" she spoke through the intercom.

"Police, Miss Ireland. We have a few more questions."

She sighed and pushed the buzzer, releasing the lock of the front door. In a few moments there was a knock on her apartment door and she opened it without hesitation.

She gasped and tried to slam it shut but he was too fast for her. It was "The Man with the Eyebrows." His foot in the door, he shoved her back. She opened her mouth to scream and he quickly covered her mouth with a dirty sweating palm.

"No more, little lady, or I'll break that jaw for good!"

She struggled, trying to get free, biting, clawing, but he held her fast. "I want the money. I came for the money and I want it. Where is it?"

She moaned under his hand and he took it away slowly. "No tricks now!"

"I—my arm! You're breaking it!"

"I said no tricks, if you

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know what's good for you. Now, where's the money?"

The pain in her arm was excruciating, but somehow she had to bluff him. "Didn't you get enough yesterday?"

He gave her a violent push that sent her flying across the room to land on the sofa. She turned and twisted, sucking in her breath for a scream—and then she saw his knife.

He held it loosely in one hand, moving it just enough to catch the glimmers of afternoon sunlight through her window. "I'd hate to cut you up, little lady. You know what I got yesterday. Newspapers! Somebody took the money and it could only be you. I'm damned if I'm going to run from the cops for a job I didn't even pull!"

"If there was no money in the envelope I'm as surprised as you are," she said, trying to keep her voice calm. "I didn't make up the deposit—the other girl did."

She started to rise from the sofa but he took a step forward and she changed her mind. Now that she had a good look at him, he wasn't nearly as dangerous as he'd been in those first moments. He still wasn't good-looking, but the bushy eyebrows helped to accent his deep brown eyes. His jaw was set and firm, the jaw of a fighter. "Cut the stalling and tell me where it is," he said, but his voice was just a bit softer, and the knife, still in his hand, was not quite so menacing.

"I saw you in the elevator," she managed to say. "Last week. I didn't tell the police that."

"Why not?"

"I don't know."

"Because you were planning to steal the money yourself, that's why."

She didn't answer that. Instead, she asked, "What made you pick on me?"

He shrugged. "I saw you in the elevator." Then, his eyes hardening a bit, he said, "Let's cut the talk now. Give me the money."

"I don't have it. The other girl must have switched envelopes."

"For what reason? So the bank would get cut-up newspaper?" He was growing impatient, and the knife moved upward.

Staring at it, Joyce knew she had only two real choices—give him the money and see her dream collapse, or risk the chance that he might kill her. And once she had given him the money, she could not even tell the police without implicating herself. He had her in much the same position she imagined him to be in. So it was give him the

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money—or—a flash of inspiration!—offer him more money.

"What if I could get even more for you?" she asked softly. "Would you let me keep some then?"

"More? What do you mean, more?"

"If I took more from the office. If I took another bank deposit and just ran with it."

"And have the cops after you?"

"What choice do I have? If I give you the money, I've got nothing."

He frowned down at her, not fully understanding. "You're a stupid broad, you know that? The cops would grab you in no time."

"Look, I'm offering you a deal. Take it or leave it."

"Spell it out."

"I'll get an even larger amount of money for you. And you let me keep what I already have."

"When?"

"Monday. As soon as the office opens."

He hesitated, but she could see he was thinking it over. "How do I know I can trust you?"

"What can I do? Tell the police and implicate myself? If I tell them I'll lose the money anyway. It would be the same as giving it to you."

"Show me the money," he said quietly after a moment.

"You'll take it."

He put away the knife. "If I'm trusting you, I should get some trust in return."

She saw that she had no choice, not if she wanted him to go along with her plan. She stood up and led the way into the bathroom. "Remember, there's much more I can get. If you slug me again and take this, you'll lose the larger amount."

"I understand." He stood away from her, aware of her suspicions. His eyes widened a bit as she lifted off the top of the toilet tank. "Say, you're a real pro, aren't you?"

She unsealed the plastic wrapping and showed him the money. "Here it is, and here it stays."

He thought about that. "If it stays, then I stay, too. I have to protect my investment."

"You can't stay in this apartment all week-end!"

"Why not? It's one place the cops won't be looking for me."

She had to admit the accuracy of his statement. "But I—what if some friends of mine come by? What if—?"

"Tell 'em you're sick, like you told the office. Tell 'em your jaw hurts." He grinned a little as he said it.

"It does hurt!"

He sat down, making himself at home. "I'm sorry about that,

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but it had to be done."

When she grasped that he really was going to stay, her mind was awash with possibilities. She imagined herself assaulted, or murdered in her bed. From there it was not too difficult to imagine herself running away with this wild, untamed man. "I don't even know your name," she said.

"It's Dave. That's as much as you need to know."

"Mine's Joyce. Joyce Ireland."

"I saw it in the papers."

She was nervous with him, as nervous as a girl on her first date. "Do you want—can I get you a drink?"

"Sure, why not? It's going to be a long week-end, baby."

They had a drink and then, because it was nearly time to eat, she took out two steaks she'd been saving for a special occasion. "You haven't told me anything about yourself," she said. "Where you come from, what you do."

He shrugged. "I was in the Army for a while. When I got out a friend and I stole a car. I ended up with a year in jail, and I guess that fixed my life. I've been running and robbing ever since."

"But—but you're so well dressed!"

"It's all an act. When you're trying to get close enough to ladies to snatch their bank deposits, you don't dress like a bum."

They had another drink after dinner, and she talked about herself—about her mother and her childhood and the lonely life she'd led till now. "I suppose that's why I wanted the money," she said. "Once I guessed you were going to steal it I wanted it for myself. I imagined all the glamorous places it could take me."

"Where's that?"

"Oh, Miami or Las Vegas or maybe even Paris."

"You got big ideas."

"You have to have in this world, I guess, because everybody else does. Until this week I thought I'd be spending my whole life at Worldwide, working for Mr. Melrose."

She expected him to share her bed that night, but he curled up instead on the living-room sofa. She could hear his snoring through the bedroom door before she finally dropped off herself . . .

On Saturday she had to go shopping, and she asked if he would accompany her. He debated for a few moments and then shook his head. Too risky. She was a bit surprised that he trusted her to go out alone, but then she remembered the money was still in the toilet

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tank. She was the one who must trust him.

But he was there when she got back, watching a college football game on television. She went to the bathroom and checked the money, and that was there, too. She had trusted him and he had trusted her Perhaps it was the start of something.

"You don't talk much about yourself," she said that evening while they were eating.

"You'd be bored with it."

"No. No, I wouldn't." She looked away, and when he didn't answer she said, "You know the first thing I noticed about you?"

"What?"

"Your big bushy eyebrows." She laughed and he laughed too, and he leaned forward a little to kiss her. His lips tasted salty—and exciting.

On Sunday afternoon she teased him into driving to the zoo with her. But he watched the animals with studied detachment, and she knew he was thinking of his own time in prison. The afternoon was not a success. When they got back to the apartment he was anxious to talk about the plans for the following day.

"How much money can you get on a Monday?"

"Collections and payments won't be too large, but we might easily have a couple of thousand left over from late Friday business. Mr. Melrose always insists on depositing before three o'clock, even on the days when the bank is open later. He keeps what's left over in the office safe."

"So how much?"

She sighed. "Maybe six thousand or so."

"Will he know you took it?"

"Probably. Especially when I don't show up for work on Tuesday. I'll take the bank deposit down and just keep going. With the other money it'll give us more than ten thousand, Dave."

He averted his eyes. "You wouldn't like running with me."

"Why not?"

"Because I'm no good. I'm a crook."

"I guess after last Thursday I'm a crook, too."

They sat up late Sunday night, watching an old movie on television. In the morning she packed a small suitcase, taking her two favorite dresses and the few items that would be important to a new life. That was all.

He drove the car downtown and she sat by his side, increasingly nervous. "I'll have to get us another car," he said. "This one will be hot."

"You mean steal one?"

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"Why not?"

"I wish you wouldn't."

"You're stealing, aren't you?"

She tried to explain. "But it's just from Mr. Melrose and the company. In a way they owe it to me."

"Well, somebody owes me a car, too."

The money—the $5275—was in its brown envelope on the seat between them. She was sliding out when she decided to leave it there. It was too late to stop trusting him now. "I'll be down a little before three," she said. "Be ready."

"Don't worry, I'll be waiting."

She stood at the curb and watched him drive away, and somehow it all seemed right.

Mr. Melrose welcomed her with a smile and words of sympathy. The brunette, Sue, muttered something and bent her head over a ledger. Joyce went to her desk and began opening the morning mail. Before long it had settled down to be a day like any other Monday.

At 2:30 she totaled up the bank deposit and announced, "There's almost five thousand, Mr. Melrose—$4934."

"Good," he said. "Joyce, I've decided I'll be going down to the bank with you for a few days—just as a safety measure."

Her stomach turned and she had to steady herself against the desk. "That's hardly necessary, Mr. Melrose. The robber's not likely to try it again so soon."

"No, but another one might. No sense taking any more chances. I'll go with you."

They walked out to the elevator and waited in silence. Her mind was whirling as she tried to think of a way out. Dave would have the car by now. He'd be waiting for her. She had to shake free of Mr. Melrose and take the money with her. Otherwise Dave would think he'd been double-crossed and take off with the original loot. And she'd be left with nothing.

The elevator arrived, and it was empty. As they rode down in silence her eyes darted about the closed car, looking for a sign that would tell her the way out.

The indicator light went from 3 to 2 to 1, and then the car stopped with a little bump. She looked at the light and saw a B under the 1, and knew what she had to do. Mr. Melrose was not gentleman enough to let her out first. As he stepped out of the car she quickly pressed the B and the *Close Door* button and prayed.

"Hey! Joyce! What the—!"

Then his voice was silenced

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by the closed elevator door, and she was dropping to the basement. Fast, fast. Every second counted.

She'd been there only once before, looking for an old filing cabinet, but she remembered her way. She was suddenly like a child, running in the near-darkness between piles of dusty boxes, finding her way out. It was the way out of all her past, of childhood and mother and self. The only way out.

Then she was free, breaking into the sunlit alley, running toward the street. She was right on schedule, and she was sure Dave would be waiting. She was sure because he loved money as much as she did, maybe more. They were a team, a pair, suited to each other.

He reached over to open the door for her. It was a tan Chevy, last year's model, and she didn't ask where he'd found it. "I was beginning to get worried," he said.

"Melrose came down with me. I had to ditch him."

"Then he's wise?"

She nodded. "He's wise now."

He wheeled the car around a corner. "Well, how much is there?"

"Almost five thousand."

"Good." She placed the envelope on the seat between them, and his hand closed over it possessively.

"Dave?"

"Yes?"

"Where are we going now? Some place far away?"

"I know a motel about twenty miles from here. We can hole up there for the night."

"The police will be looking for me."

"Hell, yes!"

"But I still feel good, Dave. It's what I wanted to do." She stared straight ahead, through the spotted windshield. "I don't mind about Melrose. Or any of it."

They were at the motel before 5:00, and he booked a single room for the night. She walked around a bit, not wanting quite yet the confinement of the room, and stood for a time at the edge of the empty swimming pool, imagining all the other pools there would be, in Florida or Mexico or California.

Then she went back to the room and found him just hanging up the telephone. "Who were you talking to?" she asked.

"Nobody. Room service."

"Oh."

After a half hour no one had come, and she thought he'd better call again. Then she suddenly rolled over on the bed. "Dave?"

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"What?"

"Do motels like this have room service?"

"Sure, why not? You think I was lying to you?"

"Dave."

"Hell, what now?"

"Dave, why were you so certain I'd taken the money and not Sue, the bookkeeper?"

"I told you. We went all through that."

"Dave, how did you know I was at home Friday? You said I'd called in sick, but I never said it. Dave, how did you *know?*"

"What is this, anyway?"

Her stomach was churning again. She was off the bed, panicky, knowing only that something was terribly wrong. She ran to the door and flung it open—and there was Sue from the office, facing her, smiling.

She thought she screamed then, but she couldn't be sure. She only saw Dave's fist coming at her once more, and felt its jarring thud against her jaw. She toppled over, hitting the floor hard, but she didn't lose consciousness.

Sue stepped over her and Joyce saw them embrace. Then Dave handed the two packets of money to the brunette and she stuffed them into her pocketbook. And suddenly they were gone. Together.

Joyce stayed on the floor for a long time without moving. When she finally got to her feet, her jaw was aching even worse than it had on Thursday. She sat on the edge of the bed and tried to think, but she couldn't. Later, much later, she reached for the telephone and dialed the police.

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a *NEW* espionage story by

ROBERT EDWARD ECKELS

Another of Mr. Eckels' realistic, convincing, low-key stories of present-day spying and counterspying, as the tug of cold war takes place on both sides of the Berlin Wall... No doubt about it, espionage is "a dirty game," and as the C.I.A. controller in West Berlin said, "When there's a job to do you have to use the tools at hand"—especially if it is vital to prevent an international "incident" and a cause célèbre *...*

GAME WITH ONE RULE

by ROBERT EDWARD ECKELS

THE GUARD ON THE COMmunist side of the checkpoint had been well briefed. He waved me through with only a pro forma glance at the papers I thrust out of the car window. This small bit of German efficiency heartened me—even from *their* Germans.

Not that the papers wouldn't have held up under closer scrutiny. They were the real thing; the fact that practically every bit of information on them was false was only incidental. It was just that this morning I didn't fancy waiting while he went through the rigamarole of checking every nook and cranny of the car to insure that I wasn't smuggling in something to contaminate the Marxist purity of the GDR.

I acknowledged his curt nod with a false, friendly smile and following instructions drove slowly down the empty early-morning street. Off to my right loomed the bulk of the Brandenburg Gate, a monument to an old and no longer relevant victory. Behind me lay a monument more appropriate to today when clearcut victories no longer seemed possible—the Berlin Wall.

I turned off Friederichstrasse to Unter den Linden, still driving at the same steady slow pace. Just past the great open expanse of Marx-Engels Platz I pulled over to the curb and cut

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the engine. And waited.

Ten minutes passed and nothing happened. I began to sweat even though the coldly rational part of me knew that they were making me wait just so I would sweat. But I still couldn't help the tight, creepy feeling that being on the wrong side of the wall gave me.

As I had told Giddings when he'd broached the assignment to me: "I don't like going over there. Too many people know me by sight if not by name."

"Of course they do," Giddings had said cheerfully. Giddings was C.I.A. controller in Berlin and like his counterparts everywhere was inclined to look at things from what sometimes turned out to be an overly optimistic viewpoint. "Of course they do," he repeated. "After that little deal you pulled in Munich I'd be surprised if there was anybody in the business on either side of the wall who didn't know you."

He washed his hands together with obvious relish. "But since this isn't a secret mission your being known is actually an advantage. Otherwise," he explained, "we'd have had to blow one of our regular agents or risk using an outsider."

That answered one question: why I'd been dragged back to Germany on such short notice. It also explained why Giddings wasn't taking no for an answer. I rubbed my hand across my eyes and sighed. "All right," I said. "What is the mission?"

Giddings leaned forward, elbows on his desk. At the moment he looked very much the rising young executive. Which in fact was what he was. Only when he'd been graduated from Harvard or Yale or whatever college he had gone to, he'd opted for the C.I.A. instead of Madison Avenue or Wall Street.

"Simplicity itself," he said briskly. "The East Germans have been holding an American named Roger Herold for the last few weeks. Now they're making noises like they might be willing to let him go if the right kind of deal can be worked out." He pointed at me with the eraser end of a pencil. "All you have to do is go over and find out what their proposition is."

"Is he one of ours?" I said, meaning is he an agent.

Giddings shook his head. "No," he said. "He's just a college-boy tourist who wanted to find out for himself what life is really like on the other side of the wall." Giddings made a wry face. "He must have decided it wasn't all milk and honey because the East Germans caught him trying to smuggle a girl over to the West

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in the trunk compartment of his car."

"Not very bright of him," I said drily.

"No," Giddings said, "it wasn't. But that's beside the point. Our job is to get him out."

I looked Giddings square in the face. "Why?" I said bluntly. "Other Americans have gotten into trouble with Commie governments and the thing's worked out through regular channels. What's so special about this boy that the C.I.A. has to get involved?"

Giddings' eyes shifted away from mine. "In the first place, as you know, there are no regular channels as far as the East Germans are concerned. And in the second place, the boy's father is Frank Herold—Senator Frank Herold. He wants his boy out fast and he doesn't care how it's done. So far we've been able to keep the story hushed up. But we can't much longer, and once the news breaks there'll be hell to pay."

I nodded my understanding. And perhaps my sympathy, too. Frank Herold was one of the most powerful men in the Senate. When he chose to, he could bring a lot of pressure to bear. I suspected that now was one of those times.

That was yesterday. Today in the cold light of an East German dawn I was beginning to have second thoughts about the wisdom of Giddings' scheme. If they wanted to, the East Germans could have a propaganda field day with the news of the arrest of a U.S. Senator's son. Capturing a C.I.A. agent sent in allegedly to rescue him would be icing on the cake.

I was just beginning to wonder what would happen if I made a sharp U-turn and headed back to the checkpoint when the door away from me was pulled open and a man climbed in.

"Good morning," he said brightly, smiling cherubically at me. "I am your contact. My name is Kramer." He was a stocky man with a bald bullet head and a knobby Slavic face. There are enough traces of the Slav in East Prussia for his family to have been German for generations back. But somehow I doubted it.

"I'm sorry to be so late," he went on, "but you know how it is with traffic these days." He spread his hands in mock helplessness.

I glanced significantly down the empty street. "Sure," I said. I handed him my papers, but he pushed them back without looking at them.

"You and I are professionals," he said. "We know

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enough not to trust papers."

"Very true," I said. "So how do I know you can deliver the goods?"

Kramer pursed his lips. "Would it convince you if I took you to the boy?"

I nodded. "It would be a step in the right direction," I said.

Kramer inclined his head to indicate the street. "If you will drive," he said, "I will tell you where to turn."

I started the engine and pulled away from the curb. Kramer settled back on the seat beside me, the cherubic smile once again on his lips.

During the drive he spoke only to give directions. Which suited me fine, since it gave me a chance to study the city. The last time I'd been in East Berlin had been shortly before the wall went up—more than nine years ago. Then the city had been pretty much of a mess from the war. They still had a long way to go to catch up with the Western Sector, but I had to admit they were making progress.

Finally Kramer told me to stop in front of a gray-stone building and we went inside. At the entrance two Border Command guards snapped to attention and saluted Kramer. They might not have existed for all the attention he gave them. Let *them* forget to salute, though, just once.

Inside, he took me to a small office off the main corridor. It was simply furnished with a desk and three straight chairs. There was a picture of Ulbricht on one wall and one of Lenin opposite it. Next to Lenin was a lighter rectangle where presumably Stalin had hung before he came an Unperson.

Kramer sat down at the desk and pulled out a sheaf of photographs. "Just so there is no misunderstanding about the nature of our case against this Roger Herold," he said, handing them to me. "These are stills from a motion picture that will be introduced as evidence at his trial." He stood up. "And now," he said briskly, "I will arrange to have the prisoner brought here."

He bustled out and I sat on the edge of the desk to look through the pictures. They were pretty standard fare. The first showed a young man—Herold, from the picture of him that Giddings had shown me before I crossed over—helping a young woman into the open trunk of a car. The next showed him locking the trunk. And so on until the inevitable discovery at the wall. I bunched the pictures together and threw them on the desk.

This time they didn't keep

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me waiting. Barely five minutes passed before the door opened and a young man, dirty, disheveled, and badly in need of a shave, but obviously the same one as in the photos, stumbled in and blinked at me.

"Hello, Roger," I said.

He looked at me suspiciously. "They said you were an American," he said. "Is that right?"

I nodded and handed him my credentials. Not being a professional, he accepted them at face value. "Thank God," he said. He sank down on one of the wooden chairs. "Are they going to let me go?"

"Not just yet," I said. "But soon."

I saw relief cross his face, only to be replaced a second later by a new anxiety. "What about Ilse?" he said. "Will they let her go, too?"

"Ilse?"

"The girl I was trying to smuggle out." He caught at my sleeve. "We can't just leave her here. You see," he went on earnestly, "it was because of me that she wanted to go to the West." He looked down, somewhat shame-faced. "We're in love and we want to get married. But we knew that if we tried to go through channels it would be years before all the red tape and petty legalisms were cleared away."

"What made you think you could get her through the wall?" I said. "You went through it once coming in. You knew the kind of check they make." The room was bound to be bugged, of course. But I wanted to know and we wouldn't be telling the Communists anything they didn't already know.

"Ilse said they only checked you coming in," he said, "not going out. Anyway, we had to risk it."

I glanced down at the photographs. "You can't have known her very long?" I said.

"It's not how long you know someone that counts," Roger said simply. "It's how you feel about them."

"Yeah," I sighed. "All right, I'll work something out." And hated myself for saying it, because of course there was nothing to work out about the girl and I knew it. But there was no point in disillusioning him now; time enough for that when he was safe across.

Roger looked at me like a grateful puppy, which didn't help either. To cover my embarrassment I said, "Any messages I can pass on for you?"

He shrugged. "You can tell my father I'm all right, I guess," he said. "Other than that I can't think of any."

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I nodded and looked around for a way to signal Kramer. There was a buzzer on the desk. I pushed it. There was no sound but two seconds later the door opened and Kramer came in, flanked by a pair of uniformed guards.

At the sight of the guards Roger stood up immediately. They'd trained him well in the weeks they'd had him. I winked at him. "Keep your chin up," I said. "It won't be long now."

He grinned, weakly at first, then more confidently, and went out between the guards. Kramer leaned back against the wall and smiled at me.

"Well," he said, "are you satisfied I am who I say I am?"

"Satisfied enough," I said. Kramer would never be exactly what he said he was. "The question now is," I went on, "what—or rather who—do you want in exchange?"

Kramer's smile broadened, pushing his cheeks even further up into his eyes. "Felix Lewis," he said.

"Felix Lewis!" Giddings exclaimed. "They can't be serious."

"Why can't they be?" I said. "They're in the driver's seat and they know it." After Kramer had made his proposition I had driven back through the wall without incident and now I was back in Giddings' office overlooking the Ku'damm.

"I know," Giddings said. He tossed down the pencil he habitually toyed with, got up, and walked over to the window to gaze on the busy street. "I know," he repeated, shaking his head. "But Felix Lewis—"

I could appreciate his distress. Ten years earlier Felix Lewis had been a laboratory assistant to one of the top men in the rocket-missile field. He had also been a spy, dutifully copying his employer's notes and forwarding them to his Russian masters. Somehow his employer had found out, but instead of going to the F.B.I. with his discovery, he had faced Lewis with it himself. It was a bad mistake. Lewis killed him and tried to disguise the murder as a lab accident. But he was clumsy about it and was arrested in a matter of days.

After that it didn't take long for the whole sordid story to come out, and the case quickly became a *cause celebre*, complicated by conflicting Federal and State jurisdictions. In the end Lewis had been tried by the State on the murder charge, convicted, and sentenced to life imprisonment.

There had been, I recalled, considerable public dissatisfaction that he hadn't been executed. Even today if you

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wanted to start an argument all you had to do was mention the name of Felix Lewis.

This then was the man the Communists wanted for the return of Roger Herold. They might almost have asked for the head of the C.I.A. himself.

When I said nothing, Giddings went on slowly, "Lewis isn't even a Federal prisoner; we'd have to go to the State to get him released. Even without that the political implications are staggering."

He turned back to face me and his voice had grown firm with decision. "No, sir," he said, "I'm not taking the rap on this one. I'm bucking it right back to Washington." He sat down at his desk and picked up his pencil. "You stick around," he said, "in case I need you."

I stuck around, but when there was no answer to his coded cable by 8:00 p.m., even Giddings was willing to call it a day. I ate a solitary restaurant meal and walked back to my hotel.

Even before I turned on the light I knew somebody was waiting in the room: some clue too subtle to register in my conscious mind gave him away. For one panicky second I considered slamming the door and diving back into the hallway. But then I realized that if it were an assassination attempt I'd already given him all the target he needed. So with barely a pause I reached out and flicked on the switch.

He had moved the room's one armchair so he could sit facing the door. Both his hands were in sight. They were empty.

"Good evening," he said in German. The sudden brightness must have hurt his eyes after sitting there in the dark, but if it did he gave no sign of it.

He was a heavy-set man with powerful shoulders and a coarse-featured face.

"Good evening yourself," I said, "and who the hell are you?"

Not a flicker of emotion showed on his face. "My name is Heussinger," he said. "But that's not important. What is important is that I'm the man who's going to get your Senator's son back for you."

"What Senator's son?" I said.

Heussinger permitted himself the luxury of looking annoyed. "Oh, come off it," he said. "You know what Senator's son. And you know too that your side can't agree to the Communists' terms."

"Maybe," I said cautiously, "maybe not. But what does it mean to you either way?"

Heussinger leaned forward in the chair. "I make a business

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out of bringing people over from the East—for a fee, of course. I've got the routes and I've got the organization. I can bring your man over"—he snapped his fingers—"like that."

"How?" I said.

Heussinger settled back again and smiled grimly. "Every trade has its secrets," he said.

"He's in jail," I said. "Who'd have to bust him out—you or us?"

"I would," Heussinger said calmly.

"And the fee?"

Heussinger's mouth twisted into another bleak smile. "Only my expenses," he said.

When I looked my disbelief he added, "And a job. Oh," he went on, holding up a hand, palm out, "I'd earn my keep. This is no polite form of blackmail. But, you see"—he paused, wet his lips—"people in my profession are looked on as some sort of criminals. This hampers my operations in the West and needless to say the consequences would be most serious if I were caught in the East. But as a C.I.A. agent I would acquire a certain status. The West German police might be more inclined to look the other way. And who knows"—Heussinger smiled again, more warmly this time—"the Communists might even be willing to exchange me for one of their own agents if they caught me."

"I see," I said. I didn't like Heussinger, but I decided to borrow a leaf from Giddings' book and kick the decision upstairs. "Wait here," I said. "I have to make a phone call."

Heussinger inclined his head slightly. "At your service," he said.

I could have called from the room, but I didn't want Heussinger picking up Giddings' phone number. So I used one of the phones in the lobby. Giddings answered on the second ring.

"This is me," I said. "You know the voice. Anything from Washington yet?"

"Yes," Giddings said after a slight pause. "I just decoded it. They're taking the matter under advisement."

"Which means no," I said.

"Perhaps not," Giddings said unconvincingly.

"Yeah," I said. "Well, in any case, there's a man in my room who says he can deliver the goods for a cheaper price."

"Who?" Giddings said. His voice was as short and sharp as the word itself.

"He says his name's Heussinger," I said. "Know him?"

"Yes," Giddings said. "He's no better than a gangster."

"He wants to change the image," I said and briefed him on Heussinger's proposition.

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When I finished, the silence stretched out taut between us. Finally Giddings broke it. "All right," he said. "When there's a job to do you have to use the tools at hand. If Heussinger can deliver, it's a deal." Then he added fiercely, "But just to keep him honest you've got to be part of the operation from start to finish."

"I was afraid of that," I said and hung up.

I went back to my room to tell Heussinger the good news. As I expected, he balked at my joining in the fun.

"No," he said flatly. "My route across the wall is worth a lot of money to me. I don't share it with anyone."

I shrugged. "Then it's no deal," I said.

For just a second I saw a flicker of indecision on Heussinger's face. Then it was gone. "I'll have to think about it," he said. "I'll let you know."

"You do that," I said and closed the door after him. "You do that," I said again to the empty room, not sure what decision I was hoping Heussinger would reach.

I thought of calling Giddings back to report Heussinger's reaction, then decided to wait a while. It was just as well I did, because half an hour later the phone beside my bed rang. It was Heussinger.

"All right," he said. "You can come along—provided you understand it's my show and you do as you're told."

"I wouldn't have it any other way," I said drily. "Just tell me what you want me to do."

"First," he said, "you arrange to get the boy out of jail." And he told me how it should be done.

When he had finished I lay back on my bed and stared thoughtfully at the ceiling.

I met Kramer the next morning in his office in East Berlin.

"You have a deal," I said. "Lewis in exchange for the Herold boy."

Kramer nodded with exaggerated gravity. "Very sensible of you," he said. "What's an aging spy compared to a Senator's son?" He clapped his hands together briskly as if recalling himself to duty. "But enough. When and where do we make the exchange?"

"Tonight," I said. "At the checkpoint where I first met you. Lewis will start walking from our side just as Herold leaves yours. They pass each other in the middle and neither one will look back."

I waited for some expression of surprise at the timing. Usually these things take much

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longer to arrange. But in this case any delay would give Kramer's people a chance to check and find out that Lewis hadn't really been released from prison.

All Kramer did, though, was nod again. "Very good," he said. "Shall we say eleven o'clock then?" From his tone he might have been arranging an after-theater dinner party.

I wasn't followed when I left Kramer's, but I knew he would check when I crossed back into the West. Any unexplained time lag would have got him all upset; nobody likes one of the other side roaming loose around his territory. So I drove straight back through the checkpoint by the Brandenburg Gate, making sure the guard got a good look at me.

As soon as I was sure I hadn't been followed from the wall, I switched cars and drove back into East Berlin through a checkpoint much farther south. This time I presented a different forged set of papers identifying me as a U.S. Army officer stationed in Berlin. As I'd expected, the guards were used to Americans traveling back and forth just to re-emphasize the right of access and they waved me through without too much fuss.

This time, though, I was followed—just the usual Border Command escort who made no effort to conceal the fact that he was tailing me. He was used to the drill too and expected me to swing around in a loose half circle and then leave by a different checkpoint. Which is just what happened, except that once when I was temporarily out of his sight around a corner, I slipped out of the car and one of Heussinger's men slid in to drive back through the wall.

Heussinger was waiting for me at his safe house.

"It's all arranged," I said. "Eleven o'clock tonight."

"Good," he said. He spread out a large map of the city on a table before us. "That means they'll leave the jail about ten thirty. They'll take this route"—his pencil traced along the map—"because it's the fastest and the most open. We'll be waiting for them here."

The pencil stopped, then lined in a bold X where a sidestreet intersected the main route. It was, I noticed, called Friedenstrasse. Peace Street.

At 10:30 Friedenstrasse was dark and empty; the workers who were building a Socialist paradise in its warehouses and small factories had long since departed for the day. There had been a street lamp on one corner across from where I sat

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alone in a parked sedan, but a well-aimed rock had taken care of that. In the dark I could make out the bulk of a truck parked just back from the intersection, across from me on the other side.

I glanced at my watch. If Heussinger was right they'd be leaving the jail about now. And it should take them no more than five or six minutes to get here.

I began to feel the old familiar tightening in my stomach, even though I was in a perfect getaway position and my orders from Heussinger were under no circumstances to mix in—orders which, incidentally, I had no intention of disobeying.

Heussinger over in the truck heard it first—the faint whine of rubber against pavement that told of an approaching car. He must have, because my first notice was the sound of the truck motor coughing into life. I tensed behind the wheel of my own car.

Lights off, the truck rumbled out into the intersection and stopped just in time to block off a dark sedan, with Neues Volks Armee markings, coming up on the right. A capped head appeared at the right-hand sedan window and shouted something that I couldn't quite make out over the clatter of the truck's diesel.

Without answering, Heussinger turned off the motor, climbed out of the truck, and went forward to lift the hood and peer under it. A second man sat stolidly in the cab. Out of sight on his lap he held a Schmeisser machine pistol, ready to fire. Heussinger also had a gun out of sight.

More shouted German which Heussinger continued to ignore. The capped head disappeared back into the sedan. A moment later a uniformed NCO got out on the driver's side and walked up to Heussinger.

"Get this truck moving," he said. "You're blocking the intersection."

Heussinger gestured toward the engine and began to rattle off some sort of explanation why the truck couldn't move. The NCO listened impatiently, hands on hips.

The other door of the sedan swung open and a man in officer's uniform got out. "*Was fehlt hier?*" he said.

He never found out what was the matter. The Schmeisser chattered and he went sprawling across the pavement. Startled, the NCO turned toward the sound. Heussinger whipped out his gun, shot, and the NCO crumpled beside the truck. Heussinger slammed the hood down, dragged the NCO's body

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out of the way, and signaled his man in the cab to get the truck moving. The motor kicked over effortlessly and a second later the truck lumbered past me and on down the street.

Instinctively I had started my own engine the moment the Schmeisser had opened up. Now I put the car in gear and drove out in front of the NVA car. Heussinger had opened the rear door and was bending over something inside. "You'll have to help me," he called over his shoulder. "He's been drugged."

I got out, leaving my motor running, and together we got the unconscious Roger into my car. Heussinger climbed into the rear seat beside him. "Get going," he said. "This place will be crawling with police in seconds."

I got going.

When we were seven or eight blocks away, Heussinger told me to pull over to the curb and we changed places. As we drove off again, I said, "I hadn't counted on any shooting."

He grinned into the rear-view mirror. "You can't make an omelet without breaking eggs," he said.

"So they tell me," I said grimly. "But now that border's going to be closed up so tight an ant won't be able to get across without a passport signed by Ulbricht himself."

Heussinger's grin widened. "Don't worry, my friend," he said. "We're going in the one direction no one will ever dream of looking for us—East."

I'll say this for Heussinger, he was a cool one. He drove at a steady five Km's below the usual rate of traffic, keeping to the main roads and picking up the Autobahn at the edge of the city. We passed a lot of police and NVA cars headed in the opposite direction. But as Heussinger had predicted, nobody paid any attention to the eastbound traffic.

We had gone perhaps fifteen or twenty miles beyond the city when Heussinger exited off the Autobahn and picked up a side road. We followed it for a while, then turned off onto a dirt track that eventually led us to a long flat meadow flanked on three sides by tall trees.

A single-engine plane stood at the near end of the meadow.

"This is it," Heussinger said.

"You've got to be kidding," I said.

"Not at all," Heussinger said. "We're less than twenty minutes flying time from West Berlin. We fly low under their radar until just before we hit the city. Then we're over and home free before they can scramble a jet to find out what it's all about."

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"If it's so easy," I said, "why hasn't it been done before?"

Heussinger grinned. "Who says it hasn't? But if you're nervous we can leave you here."

"Not a chance," I said, and got out of the car with him.

Between us we lifted Roger out of the car and a thin man in a leather jacket—the pilot—ran forward to help us get him into the plane. It was a four-seater. Heussinger sat up front with the pilot, and Roger and I were in back. Roger hadn't stirred since we'd picked him up, but he was breathing easily and his pulse was normal, so I wasn't worried. I put my hand on his shoulder to brace him for the takeoff.

The pilot punched the starter. The propeller jerked around twice. Then the motor caught, gusting out a gout of black smoke, and steadied down to an even roar.

The pilot wet his lips and faced Heussinger. "It would be a safer takeoff," he said, "if you turned on your car lights."

Heussinger's eyes flicked back toward me. "No," he said, "too dangerous."

The pilot set his face obstinately. "More dangerous not to," he said.

With a sigh Heussinger unstrapped himself, climbed down, and ran back to the car. A second later, light beamed down the length of the meadow. Heussinger ran back to the plane.

"I hope you're satisfied," he said irritably to the pilot as he refastened his seat belt.

The pilot adjusted the controls and we began to move. Aside from a few bumps at the start the field was surprisingly smooth and we were airborne well before the clump of trees at the end loomed up. The pilot banked sharply, then settled on a northwesterly course.

For just a second, though, I'd had a last glimpse of the lighted field below—and of the dark figures running out of the woods toward the car.

Forty-five minutes later, we were in Giddings' office—that is, Heussinger, Giddings, and I were in Giddings' office. The pilot had been taken God-knows-where and young Herold was in the hospital for a thorough checkup.

The flight itself had been uneventful—almost anticlimactic—except for one bad moment just after we'd crossed over into West Berlin. Two jets had screamed out of nowhere to meet us. But they had the familiar blue and white markings of the USAF and had been content to shepherd us into Tegernsee Airport.

Now Giddings was sitting

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behind his desk, frowning and tapping furiously with his pencil. "There's going to be hell to pay about that shooting."

Heussinger studied his fingernails. "It's a dirty game," he said. "At least this time you have a success to report."

Giddings looked at him distastefully for a long moment, then sighed. "I suppose that is the position we'll have to take," he said. "All right. You two can go. I'll be in touch later."

I didn't move. "It's not over yet," I said. "There's one question that still needs to be asked." When they were both looking at me I said, "Why did the Communists want Felix Lewis?"

Heussinger shrugged it off. "Who knows?" he said. "What does it matter now anyway?" He rose from his chair and would have left, but Giddings held up a hand to forestall him.

"Make your point," Giddings said to me, his eyes intent on my face.

"My point is this," I said. "It *is* a dirty game, just as Heussinger says. But it's a game with one rule: nobody does anything without a reason and the reason never is what they say it is.

"Now the Communists went to a lot of trouble to frame Roger. Oh, it was a frame all right. They couldn't have got the pictures they had unless their cameras were set and waiting for the girl to maneuver Roger into range. But why? Ostensibly to get Felix Lewis in exchange. But when you come right down to it, what would they want Lewis for? They could never use him as an agent again and any information he's got is at least ten years out of date." I paused.

"So?" Giddings said. He was still watching me intently.

"So," I went on, "my guess is that they didn't want Lewis at all. They just threw his name out as a red herring and because they knew he's one person we couldn't manage to exchange. It was all Kramer could do to keep a straight face when I showed up to tell him the deal was on. But the real giveaway was that Roger was drugged. Why should they do that when the deal was for Roger and Lewis to *walk* across the border? The only answer is that they knew there was going to be trouble along the way and they wanted to make sure Roger was kept out of it. Another example of that famous German attention to detail. Only this time it backfired."

I turned to face Heussinger. "The whole thing," I said, "was just an elaborate scheme to plant a double agent on us.

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They sent our friend here knowing we'd be sure to fall in with his quick and painless proposition."

"You're crazy," Heussinger said.

"Am I?" I said. "You couldn't make a decision on my joining the caper without first checking back with someone. And second, we had an unseen audience when we took off in the plane—an audience you didn't want me to know anything about or you would have had one of them switch on the car lights rather than run back and do it yourself. I'd guess it was Kramer you checked with and Kramer's men at the airfield.

"Oh, I'll admit it threw me a minute when you shot those two NVA types, but that was just an act—blank cartridges, of course. The entire hijack was a phony."

Heussinger mocked, "'My guess,' 'I'd guess'—all pure guesswork." He shook his head. "You can't prove any of it."

"That's right," I said cheerfully. "But the Communists can. All I have to do is leak it out—without mentioning your name—that the double agent they so cleverly planted on us is really a triple agent—someone who's been working for us all along. If you *aren't* a double agent, you won't have a thing to worry about. But if you *are*"—I smiled grimly—"your chances of survival are pretty small, wouldn't you say?"

And when we looked into his face and saw the fear there, Giddings and I had our answer.

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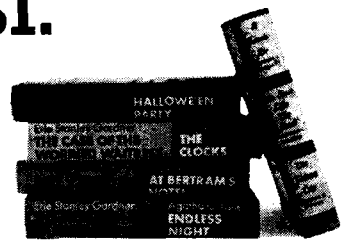

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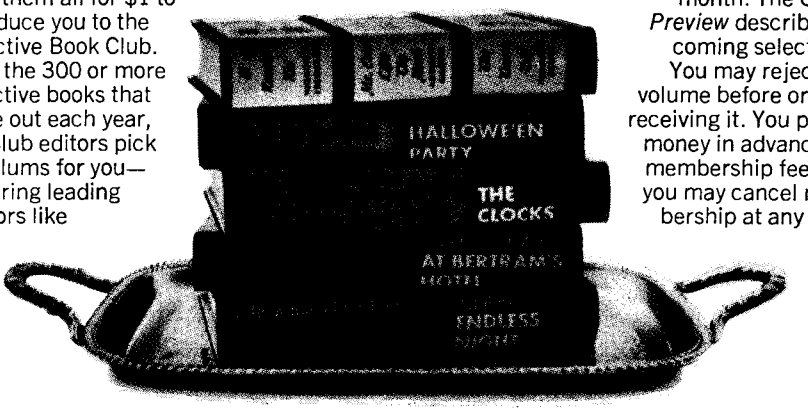

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